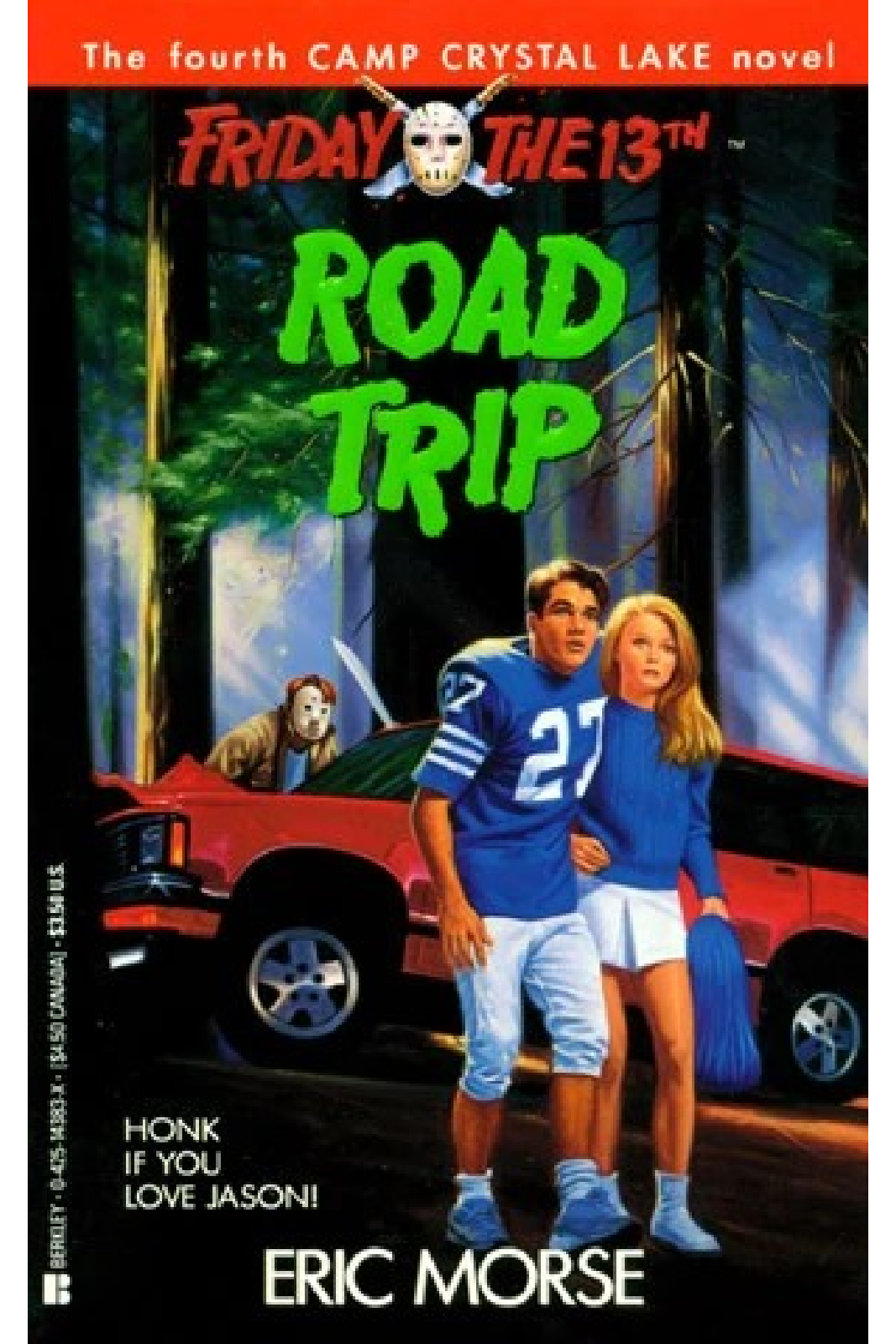
The fourth CAMP CRYSTAL LAKE novel

FRIDAY THE 13TH

ROAD TRIP



HONK
IF YOU
LOVE JASON!

ERIC MORSE

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Prologue

First Blood

It was late Saturday morning. The sun beat down, bleaching the last bit of color from the winding country road below.

On one side of the road, a row of scraggly, green trees raised their branches up to the sky. The trees looked like three giants with their arms lifted, ready to strike at any passing cars.

On the other side of the road was a small white road sign with black letters:

CRYSTAL LAKE
TOWN LIMIT

There was a strange and nasty whine in the air, perhaps from the thick, black power cables that were strung alongside the road. The road itself was utterly deserted.

Except for the spider.

The tiny, black bug was slowly making its way across the sea of gray pavement on its tiny, black, hairy legs. Halfway across, the bug paused, one leg waggling in the air as if to test the way the breeze was blowing.

And then, out of nowhere, a white Ford Impala barreled around the bend.

The spider froze.

Luckily, the car's front left tire missed the bug by an inch.

Unluckily, the car's *rear* tire caught the spider flush on the head.

The wheel ground the little spider into a speck of black goo and blood that was carried away on the tire's black rubber treads. That meant the dead spider kept spinning around, hitting the pavement again and again.

The death of the spider marked the first drop of blood spilled that day in Crystal Lake.

It would not be the last.

Not by a long shot.

Speeding Toward Crystal Lake

As the white car disappeared from view, a siren sounded, piercing the quiet country air.

A trooper's brown and white patrol car charged out from behind the row of green, scraggly trees. The cruiser bumped up onto the road and took off in pursuit of the speeding car.

Within seconds, the patrol car was right on the white car's tail. "PULL OVER TO THE RIGHT!" barked a voice over the trooper's loudspeaker. But the car didn't pull over.

Inside the car sat two middle-aged men. The driver was Donny Borelli, a short, beer-bellied man who was cackling like crazy. "Didn't I tell you we were going to have some real adventures today?" he said, backhanding his friend's stomach. "Huh? Didn't I tell you?"

The other passenger, Stu Bergman, just stared at his friend in amazement.

"PULL OVER TO THE RIGHT!" repeated the trooper, his voice booming. His siren light was flashing fiercely in the car's rearview mirror.

"Donny!" Stu gasped. "Are you insane?! Pull over!"

"Aw, I just wanted to make sure he was after us," Donny said with a grin. Then he laughed. He knew it was an absurd statement. On this deserted, godforsaken stretch of road, what other car could the trooper be after? He eased the car onto the road's gravelly shoulder and turned off the motor. He smiled at Stu.

"I told you you were going too fast," Stu muttered. "But no, you said we had to get there *early*."

The two men were wearing brand-new hunting outfits that were obviously store bought: matching blue plaid vests, porkpie hats, camouflage pants, and totally unscuffed Timberland boots. With clothes like these, you would expect the men to be carrying guns. Instead Stu was clutching a large, heavy-duty, metal flashlight. His hand was shaking hard enough to rattle the flashlight's batteries. Good ol' Stu, thought Donny. He sure scared easy.

Donny glanced at his side-view mirror and saw the trooper still sitting in his car, which he had parked a good twenty yards behind Donny's Impala. What was the cop doing? Reading a book? "Listen, Stu," Donny said, rolling down his window. "I'll pop for the ticket, okay? Don't worry your big bald head about it."

A door slammed. The trooper had gotten out of his car and was

sauntering forward through the bright September sun.

The trooper was tall and well built. He was wearing black boots, a chocolate-brown uniform, and dark reflector shades. With his heavy belt, holster, gun, and badge, he looked imposing. He took his time walking up to the car, too, letting them sweat.

"Let me handle this sucker," Donny muttered.

Just then, the trooper leaned his head through the window. He was a handsome man with chiseled features, but it was a face with little character, like you might see on a comic-book hero.

"Morning, officer," Donny said jovially. "Some beautiful weather we're having here, now isn't it?"

The trooper didn't respond. Nor did a muscle move in his face. He carefully chewed a wad of gum—once, twice—then stopped. "You gentlemen in some kind of rush?"

Donny threw back his head and laughed as if this were the funniest joke he'd ever heard. He gave the trooper his friendliest good-old-boy grin. "You know what it is, Officer? My friend and I are off on a little weekend outing this morning, and what we wanted was... we wanted to get as far away from our wives as we could, and *fast*—ha-ha-ha! Now you can understand that, can't you?"

The trooper didn't smile. Donny was beginning to think he had misjudged his audience.

"You were going sixty-five in a forty-mile-an-hour zone," said the trooper.

"You married?" Donny asked.

There was no sign of movement in the trooper's sculpted features. "Can I see your registration?"

"Of course. Stu, could you reach in the old glove compartment there?"

White-faced, Stu dropped his flashlight on the dash and started fumbling with the glove compartment door. He finally got it open. Three packets of Kleenex, two tubes of lipstick, a rolled-up pair of sheer pantyhose, a paperback romance novel, a Betty Boop keychain, and a nasal decongestant spray tube all came tumbling out onto Stu's lap.

"See?" Donny asked the officer. "That's all my wife's stuff. She always messes up the car."

"Registration," the trooper repeated.

Stu finally managed to find the papers, which Donny handed over to the officer. As the trooper reached his hand into the car, Donny saw a band of red skin on the man's third finger, probably marking the spot where he'd once worn a wedding band. Great, thought Donny. He had really hit on the wrong approach with that crack about the wives. "What we're going to do," Donny said, eager to keep the trooper

talking, "is... What's that word again, Stu?"

"Spelunking."

"Right. Spunking. Spinking. Whatever. Cave exploring is what it means. Stu here's got this guidebook says there's this mighty fine cave up on Crystal Hill."

The trooper, who had been studying Donny's registration, now raised his head. Though Donny couldn't see through the man's reflector shades, he felt as if he could still read surprise in the trooper's eyes. "You're going *where?*" the officer asked.

"Uh... Crystal Hill?"

Stu leaned over as far as his seat belt would allow. "Why, Officer? Is there some kind of problem?"

The trooper looked back down at the registration. "Nope. Not unless you consider dying a problem."

Donny and Stu exchanged glances. For a second, Donny felt a twinge of panic, which was not something Donny usually felt. Then he got the joke and burst out laughing. "Oh, good one. You really got me there, Officer. Burn!"

The trooper shook his head. "I'm not joking." He handed Donny back his registration, then flashed a brief, unnerving smile.

"This town you just sped into, most folks aren't in such a hurry to get here," he said. "Fact is, they usually do their speeding on the way out." The trooper chuckled dryly. "See, there's a death curse on this town.

"You heard me right," he added, though neither Donny nor Stu had made any move to question him. "Started years ago, back when there used to be a summer camp for kids, out by the lake. Nice place, too."

The trooper swatted the back of his neck, apparently trying to hit a mosquito. "But then," he went on, "some counselors got all *horny*." His face was turning red. "They let their bodies get the better of their brains, know what I mean?! Well, do you?!"

"Uh, yeah, sure, we know what you mean," Donny said. Donny Borelli had never scared easy. He wasn't scared now. But what he was thinking was, *We've got a live one here, boys*.

"So," said the trooper. "While these counselors were going at it, this little boy drowned in the lake. Jason Voorhees was his name. Remember that name, gentlemen, because that little kid is the guy who put this town on the map. Crystal Lake, Massachusetts. Deathtrap, U.S.A."

"I think you mean *speed* trap," Donny joked.

The trooper looked off, staring down the deserted road as if he hadn't heard what Donny said. "Jason Voorhees," he repeated ominously. "The boy who wouldn't stay dead."

"How's that again?" Stu asked, his voice rising.

"The boy who wouldn't stay dead," Donny told him, answering for

the trooper.

"He comes back, you see," the trooper said. "He's all grown, but his face is bloated and rotted. Yours would be too if you spent all those years floating down at the bottom of the lake, right? So what he does is, he wears this white hockey mask to cover up the rot and he—"

The trooper raised his arm as if holding an imaginary knife and demonstrated what Jason liked to do when he came back from the dead. "Stabs everyone he can find," the trooper said, with what sounded like satisfaction in his voice.

The trooper stuck his head back in the car, getting his face close enough for Donny to feel his breath. He lowered his voice.

"If I were the two of you boy scouts, what I'd do is I'd turn this baby around and head on back wherever you come from. But hey, it's your funeral."

The trooper straightened. "I'm going to let you go with a warning this time," he said, looking back up the road again. "You can return the favor by going home."

And with that, he spun on the heels of his black boots and started his slow purposeful march back to his car.

"What a jerkface," Donny muttered as soon as he was gone.

"Let *me* handle him," Stu mimicked.

Donny held out both hands palm up. "Did we get a ticket?"

"Donny," Stu said. "Let's get out of here. You heard the guy. This town's a deathtrap."

"Don't be a fool," Donny said. "He's just some kook who gets his jollies by scaring the out-of-towners."

"Well, he succeeded," Stu said. "Hey...! Donny...! Donny!"

But it was too late. Donny had already gunned the engine and pulled out.

He took off down the road, into Crystal Lake.

Three Cheers for Carville

Five hours later and fifty miles away...

The Carville Hornets broke from their huddle and lined up in their defensive stance.

It was the fourth quarter of their football season opener, an away game against Thompson High. With only one minute and forty-nine seconds left to play, the Hornets were clinging to a slim five-point lead. But Thompson had the ball on the Hornets' thirty-nine-yard-line. They were driving.

Carville cheerleading captain Missy Lowe stepped out onto the field so that her nine teammates could all see her. "Hit 'em high, de-fense, hit 'em high!" she screamed. As she yelled out the final word, she waved her orange-and-black pom-poms high in the air.

"Hit 'em low, de-fense, hit 'em low!" answered the cheerleading team, shaking their pom-poms down by the ground.

And then the entire team yelled out the end of the cheer in unison: "Bury 'em, de-fense—six feet below!"

On the word "below," they all jumped down into splits.

Out on the field, there was a loud hand clap as the Thompson offense broke from their huddle. The Thompson quarterback crouched down, ready to take the snap from center. "Three, twenty-one," he barked, turning his head from side to side as he looked over Carville's defensive alignment. "Three, twenty-one, *green*—"

He's audibilizing, thought Summer Stone, one of the cheerleaders on the Carville sidelines. He sees something in our defense, and he's changing the play...

"Hut one, hut two—"

Suddenly, the players were all moving like crazy. The Thompson quarterback faded back to—

"Pass!" screamed Summer. "*Pass!*"

As often happened, she had picked up the play even before Coach Wardell, who watched the field like a hawk and cried out almost constant instructions to his players. At sixteen, Summer was the youngest of five kids, and all her older siblings were boys. She had grown up in a house whose TV was almost always turned to sports. Not only that, she had seen all four brothers play varsity football for Coach Wardell. Football was in her blood. And her blood was telling her that Thompson was about to score.

The only hope was Russ Johnson, Carville's big linebacker star, who was hurtling toward the Thompson quarterback like a truck with broken brakes.

Following the advice of the cheerleaders, Russ hit the quarterback hard enough to bury him six feet below.

But a split second before he made the tackle, the quarterback threw the ball.

The pass spiraled out high and long and unharmed and...

Summer jerked her head around to watch the ball's slow, arcing descent. It landed snug in the hands of the wide-open Thompson receiver, who caught the ball without even breaking stride.

Touchdown.

Across the field, a wave of wild cheering swept through the crowded home-team bleachers. Among the few parents and visitors on Summer's side of the field, there was a stunned silence.

"That's bad, isn't it?" Missy asked Summer.

"Not if you're on their team," Summer joked.

"Oh, Summer, you're awful," Missy said. "You just don't care about anything." She was a tall, willowy blonde who wore her long hair in about twenty braids, all of which were bouncing as she jumped up and down in frustration. "Is there a flag on the play?" she cried. "Tell me there's a flag on the play. There! Isn't that a flag?"

"That's a flag, but it's still in the ref's pocket," Summer explained.

"Oh."

Standing to Summer's left was a short, pretty black girl who wore her shoulder-length hair straight (thanks to hair relaxer, she had once explained to Summer). After Missy, Belinda Karras was Summer's closest friend on the cheerleading team. "I told Russ he's got to rush faster," Belinda muttered, "but do you think he listens to me? No!"

Summer's jaw dropped. "Belinda, you're not blaming Russ for that play, are you? Look what he did to their quarterback. He's still down!"

It was true. Several players had huddled around the Thompson quarterback as the team trainer attended to him. Russ stood by, his head bent with worry. Summer smiled. Russ was a mean player on the field, but a gentle guy off.

Now the Thompson coach trotted out to join the crowd, along with a man that Summer guessed must be the quarterback's father. Her heart seized up at the sight.

"Oh, dear," said Missy. "I hope he's not dead."

"That's certainly the worst that could happen to him," Summer agreed.

Missy gave her a look.

"If he dies, they'll probably arrest my Russ," said Belinda. "Or at least sue him."

"Is that what you're worried about?" Missy asked. "You're awful too!"

The sight of the fallen player had silenced the home crowd. He *did* look dead, thought Summer. It was as if he had fallen out of the sky, he

lay so still.

Summer was tall with a helmet of dark hair, a wave of which slashed across her face, hiding her eyes in shadow whenever she leaned her head forward. She leaned forward now, letting her hair hide the concern in her deep blue eyes.

Thanks to her wisecracking, Summer was known around school as a big cynic. But the truth was, she couldn't stand anyone suffering; when the TV news came on she always changed the channel so she wouldn't have to see a car wreck somewhere. She hated to see anyone cry.

They had taken off the quarterback's helmet. He wasn't moving at all. As she often did when she was upset or afraid, Summer started to fantasize. She imagined the poor Thompson quarterback being taken from the field on a stretcher. Imagined that he was paralyzed—for life. *Then* she imagined herself married to the guy and standing by him even though he was confined to a wheelchair....

Loud applause shook her out of her reverie. The quarterback was okay, Summer was relieved to see. He was walking off the field under his own power.

The Thompson offense lined up for the extra point. *Boof!* The kicker knocked the ball straight through the uprights. Summer glanced up at the scoreboard. HOME 34, AWAY 32.

"This is so horrible," Missy moaned. "Now we're going to lose, right?"

"Looks that way," Summer agreed.

"How did this happen? I mean, we were cheering so hard."

Missy was a sweet girl and all heart, but she was no great shakes in the brains department. Summer could never get over Missy's blind faith in the power of cheerleading.

"It was Russ's fault," Belinda said, shaking her head.

"Belinda," Summer said, "it was not."

Though she begged herself not to, Summer turned and glanced down the Carville sideline. Her eyes found him immediately. Number 19.

Number 19 was a tall, rangy player—Carville's top receiver. He had his helmet on, plus shoulder pads, but Summer recognized him. She would know that outline anywhere.

Slick.

He was watching the field, calm and cool as always. Summer knew what he was thinking, too. Even with only a minute to go, he was sure that they would score one more time. Slick never got nervous or rattled, at least not that Summer had ever seen.

Slick.

She forced herself to turn away.

Slick was seventeen. He'd been redshirted, held back a year so he'd be a better college prospect and get a bigger scholarship. Summer and

Slick had gone out for one whole year. Then, two months ago to the day, Summer found out that Slick was cheating on her.

That day she paid a surprise visit to his house. She and Slick almost never got each other stuff, but on an impulse she'd bought him two CDs of his favorite group, Smashing Pumpkins. She found the front door of his house unlocked, so she tiptoed upstairs without making a sound. And there they were.

Him and Marjo Banning, this Carville girl who had gone off to college at U. Mass, which was only twenty minutes away.

It wasn't the first time Slick had betrayed her. It was the third time, as a matter of fact. The third time that she knew about, anyway. But this time she had finally gotten it together and broken up with Slick—for good.

For good. She had to repeat those words to herself every time she saw him.

"We should start doing some major cheers," Missy said, peering out at the field.

The Carville kickoff return man had been gang-tackled on the twelve. Now the Carville offense was jogging glumly onto the field. "We've got to get our team's spirits back up," Missy said. She cupped her hands to her mouth and screamed, "*Go, Dave! You can do it! I love you!*"

There were a few shocked titters among the rest of the cheerleaders. As he trotted out onto the field, Dave Myers, the Carville quarterback and captain, turned his helmeted head toward Missy. Summer could tell he wasn't pleased.

Dave and Missy had been going out for three months now. Last month, Dave had made it a rule that Missy could only tell him she loved him a maximum of three times a day.

Summer giggled. "That's your third time," she told Missy.

Missy looked at her, her mouth slack. "How do *you* know?" she asked, surprised.

"I don't," Summer said. "But when you scream that out in front of everyone like that, I think Dave's going to count it as a three in one."

Missy didn't react right away. Sometimes when you said something to Missy, it was like dropping pebbles into a very deep well; you had to wait before you heard the splash. Missy finally grinned. She shrugged. "I can't help it," she said. "I just love him to pieces. Have I mentioned that to you guys?"

"Repeatedly," Summer said.

"Well, I do," Missy said dreamily. Shaking her head from side to side, so that her braids danced around like snakes, Missy jumped out in front of the cheerleading squad, ready to lead more cheers.

"If she doesn't watch it, I'm going to start one of those Dave rules on her myself," Summer muttered to Belinda. "You know, like she can

only tell *us* she loves Dave three times a day."

Belinda grinned. "You are wicked, girl."

"I know."

When the ref blew his whistle to resume play, Summer felt her face start freezing up. She always got this way when Slick was on the field.

On the first down, Dave threw to Slick—complete!—and it was good for another first. But on the next pass, Slick was tackled for only a five-yard gain. Carville called time-out.

Instantly, Missy was on the field again. The girl was tireless. But before she could start a cheer—

"Bzzzzzzzzz!"

A boy wearing a large, round bee head with a long, black stinger of a nose, trotted over to Missy.

"Not now, Buzzy!" Missy hissed at him.

Buzzy the Bee was the team mascot. Inside the Buzzy mask was Teddy Bateman, a short, geeky senior. He was supposed to clown around only at halftime. But he always tried to keep up the act throughout the game.

Poor Teddy, thought Summer.

"Buzzy," as everyone at Carville had taken to calling him, was desperately horny. His Buzzy role was his only chance to get close to the cheerleaders. Teddy milked the opportunity for all he could get.

Genuinely angry, Missy shoved Teddy backward. But Teddy made a big show of falling over, to the delight of the packed Thompson bleachers.

"That's what's going to happen to your offense!" someone shouted from the other side. "Flatten 'em, Thompson!"

"Teddy," Missy hissed down at the fallen clown. "We're trying to *cheer* here. I've told you a hundred times. Not during the fourth quarter."

Teddy stayed on the ground, his arms spread wide. In this position, his long black stinger was sticking straight up in the air. Summer whispered something in Belinda's ear. Belinda burst out laughing and passed on Summer's joke to the next girl in line, who in turn passed it on ... and in seconds the whole squad was laughing at Teddy and pointing at him. Teddy lifted his head, then dropped it. "They hate me," Summer heard him moan.

She felt guilty at once. She went over and reached down to help him up. "C'mon, Teddy," she told him quietly. "You know how Missy gets when we're behind."

"Oh, right," Teddy said, his voice muffled through the big mask. "Like she loves me the rest of the time."

"Missy loves everybody," Summer said, pulling him off the field.

Teddy took off his mask head and sat on it. He had a mop of curly,

dark hair that Summer thought looked like a plate of spaghetti had been dumped on his head and had stuck there. Right now he was sweating from the heat of the mask. Behind his large, clear-frame glasses, his small, dark eyes looked pained. Summer knew the feeling and her heart went out to him. "Well, *I* think you're great," she said, squinching up her face; it embarrassed her to say anything mushy.

Teddy looked surprised, blinking several times behind his big glasses. Then he scowled. "Oh, right," he said. "Very funny. You really are the big jokester, aren't you?!"

"I mean it," she said, but he just kept glaring at her. Picking up his big bee head, he moved farther down the sidelines. That's what you get for being such a smart aleck, Summer chided herself; when you tell the truth, nobody believes you.

She turned and stared out at the field, and winced. Play had resumed, and Dave threw the ball out of bounds to stop the clock. Twelve seconds left. And victory was still seventy-six yards away.

"Oh, please let them win," prayed Missy.

"No way," said Summer.

"Oh please, oh *please*," Missy prayed harder.

"You know what *I* hope?" asked Summer. “I hope Slick gets wide open, but then he drops the ball and blows the whole game."

Missy opened her mouth wide enough to swallow a Blimpie everything-on-it hero sandwich in one gulp. "What is *wrong* with you?!" she gasped.

"Oh, she doesn't mean it," Belinda told Missy, rolling her eyes.

"I do mean it," Summer said as casually as she could. Which wasn't all that casual, because Dave was going back to pass again, and he was obviously looking to his favorite target, Slick Chambers. Slick was sprinting down the sideline, right toward Summer.

And here came the pass.

Summer could barely breathe, she was praying so hard for Slick to catch it.

Which he did, effortlessly as always.

A split second later, though, the Thompson defender lowered his shoulder and threw himself at Slick. If he knocked him out of bounds, the game was over.

But the moment Slick caught the ball, he stopped short, then cut right.

It was as if he had eyes in the back of that ever-so-handsome head of his, because that stutter-step meant that the Thompson player went sailing through the air and ate dirt. And now Slick, who was the fastest player on the field (not to mention off), was streaking toward the goal line. And there was no one who could stop him. Not the other cornerback. Not the safety. Slick was going all the way.

The cheerleaders were all screaming and running out onto the field. So were the players and the few parents who had made the trip. Slick spiked the ball and did a little dance.

Summer stayed right where she was. She looked up. The clock on the scoreboard had clicked down to a big 0:00. The large bulbs glowed brightly in the gathering dusk. Overhead, dark storm clouds were gathering. The Thompson players, heads down, were filing off the field in stunned disbelief. But Summer was happier than she could ever remember.

Still, there was no way she could go running after Slick. No way she could be one of the crowd trying to slap his back. Not after what had happened.

The offense got to Slick first, piling on top of him in a way that Summer—even in her joy—was terrified would crush him.

When Slick finally got up out of the pile, he started jogging back toward the bench. Everyone was trying to catch him and pat him and touch him. Which was how it always was with Slick. Everyone wanted a piece of him.

But then, as he came up the field, he suddenly veered, making one of those quick cuts that made him such a great receiver. He ran out of bounds—right to Summer.

Something inside her melted at the sight. And then there was nothing she could do about it. Her arms flew around his neck as if they weren't part of her own body.

His large, strong hands were gripping her thin waist, and the next thing she knew he was tossing her straight up into the air.

The moment she landed, Slick tossed her back up again. He was laughing. So was she.

And as she went up in the air again, it was as if all the sadness and hurt she'd been feeling this past two months just vanished. Vanished into thin air.

3

M.P.P.

By four that afternoon, Donny Borelli was thinking that maybe that trooper had been telling the truth after all. Maybe there *had* been a lot of grisly murders in these parts. Because he and Stu had been hiking around Crystal Hill for hours, and so far they hadn't seen a single solitary soul.

They also hadn't found the cave.

"Donny," Stu said, puffing hard as they emerged into a small clearing. "Maybe... we should just... bag it."

Donny stood with his hands hooked in the pockets of his blue plaid hunter's vest, which he wore open over his large gut. "And tell the guys what?" he asked. He hawked and spit against a tree trunk. He watched as the white spittle ran down the bark. "Tell them we're a couple of idiots who couldn't even find the cave? We'd be the joke of the team, Stu. You know that."

Donny and Stu belonged to the same bowling league and the same team, the Red Devils. Bowling used to be the most exciting thing either of them ever did. But then Lee Hammermill went white-water rafting one Memorial Day weekend and couldn't stop bragging about how dangerous it was and how bravely he had acted. That started it. These past couple of years all the men on the Red Devils had begun looking for new adventures—from bungee jumping to parasailing—always trying to outdo one another.

"I was just thinking," Stu began, looking down at the ground as he kicked at some pine needles with his shiny new hiking boot.

"Just thinking what?"

"Well, you know, we could be on the wrong hill. That's just for starters. Or this crappy guidebook could be wrong. It's five years old, after all."

"Oh, right," Donny said. He grinned. "You're thinking what? The cave moved? The cave is where now... in Virginia?"

Stu stared at him. There was hurt in his pale rabbit-face, but determination, too. He glanced at his watch. "It's four-thirty," Stu said. "If we don't find the cave by five o'clock, I'm turning back. With you or without you."

Donny didn't answer, just started trudging out of the clearing, following a narrow path that snaked back into the forest. These were weird woods, with all kinds of oddly shaped plants Donny didn't recognize and big, dead trees with branches white as bones. The woods were also thick with briars and vines that clutched at his pants with every step.

Luckily, he didn't have to go far. Because as he turned the next corner...

There it was. A jagged, dark opening in the rock face of the hill. It made Donny stop short.

It was odd, in a way. As hard as they'd been searching for the cave, he didn't feel happy. There was something so ominous about that crack in the rock. Like a black hole waiting to suck them in.

"Oh, wow" was all Stu could say.

The look of fear on Stu's face gave Donny new strength. The sissy. Donny started tromping toward the entrance to the cave.

"C'mon," he said without looking back.

***

In the home-team showers of Thompson High, the only sound was the hiss of water, raining down on the players' bowed heads.

The visiting team showers were a different story. Everyone was whooping and shouting and laughing. Then Slick came in with an empty Sprite can he had found in the locker-room trash. He nodded in the direction of Teddy "Buzzy" Bateman. There were snickers from the rest of his teammates, but sounds were drowned out by the shouts and roar of water.

Slick eyed his prey. Buzzy, that skinny, slight-shouldered little geek, was standing in the corner, his arms crossed over his chicken-bone chest, his eyes shut tight. The guy's glasses were sitting on green plastic soap dispenser, which he had placed at his feet. And, as if he didn't stick out enough already in a shower full of jocks, Buzzy was the only one wearing flip-flops.

Slick turned on a shower, so that it trickled water. Holding the can away from his naked body, he placed it under the stream. When the can felt full, he moved toward Buzzy, his teammates clearing a path for him. Then he flicked the can hard, dashing a stream of ice water right in Buzzy's face.

Buzzy screamed. It was a high-pitched girl's scream, his mouth open wide.

What a loser, Slick thought.

Buzzy chased after Slick, groping blindly without his glasses. Slick was laughing as he dodged away. Buzzy banged into several of the players. Each player he banged into shoved him away, so that he smacked into someone else. Finally he banged into Billy Raymond, the team's huge center.

"Back off, queer-o," Billy shouted, pushing Buzzy hard against the tiled wall.

And right then Slick started feeling this crazy impulse to just go ahead and finish Buzzy off. The kid was so pathetic it made Slick mad.

He even cocked a fist, ready to step in and punch Buzzy right in the head.

But big Russ Johnson grabbed Buzzy with one arm and got his other arm in between him and Slick. "What's the matter with you guys?" Russ shouted over the roar of the showers. "Geez—this is how you act after we win? This is our mascot, guys. Our mascot! Didn't any of you guys ever hear of bad luck? You hurt Buzzy you're looking at bad luck for the rest of the season, I promise you."

"Buzzy-lover," teased Tommy Bartlett, the kicker.

Slick joined in the laughter.

Buzzy angrily pulled his arm free from Russ. As everyone watched, he retrieved his glasses and soap dish and stalked out of the showers, his flip-flops comically slapping the tiles with each step.

That was Buzzy all over, thought Slick. Russ saves his skin, and he doesn't even say thanks.

It was Dave who started the cheer. "Buzz-ee! Buzz-ee! Buzz-ee!"

It was a cheer the entire school liked to chant—during lunch, before assembly, it was good anytime. The teachers had never been able to stop it, either. But just then Coach Wardell appeared in the shower entranceway. That stopped the cheer pretty quick.

Coach didn't seem mad though. Good old Coach, thought Slick. He hated Buzzy as much as anybody. He couldn't stand anybody who didn't play ball.

"Let's hurry it up, guys," Coach said with a grin. "We've got a long road trip ahead of us."

***

Outside the Thompson High gym, dusk had fallen, and with it came the first drops of rain. The team's large yellow bus was parked in the circular drive. Almost everyone was already on board. Twenty yards past the bus sat Coach's big white van, its engine idling. As the last few stragglers hurried out of the gym, three cheerleaders remained standing under the building's cement overhang. They had changed out of their uniforms into their street clothes.

"He's pond scum," Belinda was telling Summer. "You gotta forget about him."

Summer managed a half smile. "I have forgotten about him," she lied. "Slick who?"

"I just can't believe he would pick somebody else to ride with him in the van," Missy said, shaking her head and her braids.

After each away game, it was a Carville tradition that the three M.V.P.s named by Coach Wardell had the privilege of riding back in his van. And they could pick whomever they liked to ride with them. Russ had picked Belinda. Dave had picked Missy. Slick had picked—well, no

one knew who Slick had picked. But Summer kept picturing who. Fantasy girls, curvier and sexier than any girls she knew at Carville, or any girls anywhere.

"After the way he acted right after the game and all," Missy said. "Kissing you like that. What was he trying to do? Lead you on?"

"Who knows," Summer said. She grinned. "But guys, I dumped *him* two months ago, remember? There's no reason he should pick me to ride with him."

"Time-out," Belinda said. "You had a very good reason to dump him, remember?"

"That's right," Missy agreed. "He should be begging you to get back together with him."

Begging. That didn't sound like Slick Chambers's style, Summer thought ruefully. Everyone always begged Slick, not the other way around.

"Anyway, Missy's one hundred percent right," Belinda said, scowling. "He should have asked you to ride with him. You should have said no, but he should have asked you."

Summer shoved her hands deeper in the pockets of her orange and black Carville parka. It was raining harder now and with the rain came a breeze, a breeze with a bite to it. It was an unpleasant reminder of the winter that was coming and the warmth they were leaving behind.

"Hey, you guys better hurry," squeaked a voice behind them.

Summer turned. It was Teddy, looking more miserable than usual. He was lugging a big drawstring bag of footballs over one shoulder; he reminded Summer of a miniature, emaciated Santa Claus.

Teddy always got to ride in the van. But not because he was an M.V.P. He was more like an M.P.P.—Most Picked-on Person. Coach made him ride in the van so Teddy could navigate—and also, Summer suspected, so Coach would have someone to yell at whenever he got into one of his surly moods.

"Tell Coach we'll be there in a second," Belinda told Teddy. The short boy shrugged and headed out into the rain, struggling under his load.

"You want us to ride with you on the bus?" Missy offered.

Summer felt a surge of warmth. Missy might be dumb, but she was also as good-hearted as a little puppy dog. Dave Myers didn't deserve her, and that was the truth. "Thanks," Summer said, "but that would just make him feel more important than he already does, if that's possible. Anyway, don't worry about me. I'm over him."

"Right," Belinda said, eyeing her closely.

"I *am*."

"And you will never ever get back together with him," Belinda told her, her dark eyes narrowing as if she were trying to look right into Summer's brain.

"And I will never ever get back together with him," Summer repeated dutifully, "not in a million trillion years."

"That's a long time," said Missy thoughtfully.

Summer guffawed. "We better get a move on it," she said. "I don't want to get left around here." She pulled the hood of her parka over her head and hurried out into the chill, pelting rain. "See ya back at school," she called without looking back.

As she ran toward the bus, she made a major league effort not to glance at the van. She knew she'd see Slick's head through the side window, and catch a glimpse of whatever bimbo he had chosen to ride with him. Maybe she'd see them necking.

Her mind flashed on an image of Slick, leading some bombshell by the hand up to his attic hideout. He had a cot up there and a little trunk of liquor and his tape deck. His "love nest" he called it. Before Summer could stop herself, she was daydreaming about Slick's foxy head lowering slowly, slowly, right down onto this beautiful girl's face.

Summer groaned out loud as she tried to shake the awful image out of her brain. There was something wrong with her, there really was, she told herself.

She tapped on the door of the bus and waited while the driver, Mr. Morrisey, folded in the batwing of a door. He glared at her, then took his clipboard off the dash.

"Summer Stone," she said, taking her hood off and shaking her hair back to its normal shape.

He checked her name off. "You're last," he told her grouchily.

"I'm honored," she said with a forced smile.

She trudged past the friendly faces of the athletes and other cheerleaders. She was greeted with a chorus of hellos, none of which made her feel any better. She had lied to Belinda and Missy. After those hugs and kisses Slick had given her, she felt like half a person. Like Slick had stolen her heart.

There was a victory party tonight at the gym. Summer was dreading it. The happiness that she had felt after Slick scored the winning touchdown had disappeared completely, leaving her feeling even lower than before. Unbelievable—he had gotten her hopes up yet again.

She had to go all the way to the back of the bus to find an empty seat. This was the hot seat, where the heat from the engine made you sweat no matter what the weather, and where the stench from the bathroom blasted you every time the door swung open.

That's why the back seat was always empty.

Except for tonight.

Slouched down, his head tilted to one side, and his wickedly sexy eyebrows hooding his clear, brown eyes, was Slick Chambers.

"You're late," he said.

The Mask

"Sorry," Summer told Slick without missing a beat, "I was changing into something more comfortable."

Slick glanced out the bus window into the darkness. Without looking at her, he said, "Anyway, I don't know if you heard, but Coach picked me as number one M.V.P."

"I read about it in the *Boston Globe*," Summer quipped.

Slick smiled. "Yeah. Well, I get to ask someone to ride with me in the van. I wanted to ask you personally."

"You're a jerk," Summer said, "you know that?"

She felt so weak-kneed. Her knees were actually knocking together.

"So what's it to be, Stonehenge?" Slick asked.

Nasty nicknames and wisecracks—they had always had this banter between them. The joking felt necessary. It was as if their bodies gave off an electrical charge in each other's presence, and the tension could only be eased through teasing. Summer glanced up the aisle, craning her head to see out one of the bus windows. She spotted Coach Wardell in his black slicker, heading for the van. She had to make up her mind, fast.

"You want *me* to ride with *you*, Chamberpot?" Summer made a face of mock shock. "I'm surprised."

Slick was studying his school ring, twisting it back and forth. The guy rarely gave you the satisfaction of looking straight at you, so when he finally did look at you, it was a total killer. Like now, when he slowly raised his head. Those eyes! Liquid amber.

"No joke, Summer," he said softly. "Whadda ya say?"

Her head was saying *NO!* but her heart was saying *YES!!* And the message from her heart was way louder.

Summer felt her eye begin to twitch; she prayed it wouldn't show. "I'm not getting back together with you," she warned him.

He shrugged. "I'm not asking."

"Not in a million years."

"Fine."

"And I haven't forgiven you for what you did, not even slightly."

He laughed.

"Just so you know," she said. But she had already lost the fight, she realized. It was like she was slipping and sliding down an icy slope. Now that she had started down, she was going to fall all the way to the bottom. She tried again. "I guess what I'm trying to say is, you're not going to get anywhere with me, so if you want to ask somebody else..."

Slick got to his feet deftly, despite the cramped space. He put a hand

on her shoulder and spun her around, marching her back down the aisle.

The bus was pulling out. Summer hurried up the aisle, enjoying the feel of Slick's hand on her shoulder. "Hold it!" she cried to the driver.

Mr. Morrisey gave her a really dirty look this time. But he braked and pulled the door crank. The bus door opened with a scrape and a wheeze.

Up ahead, through the downpour, Summer saw the red tail lights of the van as it started to pull out of the parking lot.

"C'mon!" Slick yelled, grabbing her hand. They started to run.

Nothing mattered to her anymore. So what if they got left behind? She didn't care if she ended up stuck in the middle of the woods, just as long as she was with Slick.

Slick was shouting. The van stopped at the end of the school drive, signaling for a left turn onto the main road. They ran faster and Slick slapped the window just as the van started to move. The van stopped again. Slick slid open the side door.

"There you are!" Coach said, looking back at them from the driver's seat with a ferocious bulldog scowl. It had taken Summer years to learn that this was just Coach's natural expression; it didn't necessarily mean he was mad. "I looked through the whole locker room for you, Slick," Coach said gruffly. "I was beginning to think you deserted your old Coach."

"Never," Slick promised him.

Coach grinned.

Sitting next to Coach was Teddy. The short boy glanced at Summer, then at Slick, then turned straight around in his seat again. Poor Teddy had a crush on her, Summer knew, and now he was feeling jealous.

"Hi, Coach," Summer said.

Coach nodded. He didn't say anything, but he seemed pleased to have her on board as well.

Summer pulled the door shut behind her. The van lurched forward.

Then Coach turned left and began the long ride home.

***

Back at Crystal Lake, it was pouring. But unlike Coach Wardell, the state trooper had his lights off. He was driving along a bumpy dirt road that led through thick woods on either side.

All day long, his two passengers had kept up a terrible knocking from inside the trunk of the patrol car. Now the noise had finally stopped.

That was a good sign, thought the trooper. This way, his passengers wouldn't have a lot of fight left in 'em.

He looked down at the white hockey mask that lay on the seat beside him.

With its dark eyeholes and round mouth, the mask was staring up like the face of a corpse.

The trooper smiled.

Lost!

"Hey, Summer," Russ Johnson said with that friendly drawl of his.

"Hey," Summer said back. She had always liked Russ.

The old van had two rows of green-cushioned seats. The big, black linebacker was stretched out in the van's first row. Then came the row where Dave was lying, using the fuzzy Buzzy bee head as a pillow. Behind that was the "way back," a carpeted section that faced the van's rear window. Missy and Belinda were back there. Belinda waved, Missy held up her knitting. Looked like she was knitting Dave yet another orange and black sweater.

"Scoot over, big guy," Slick told Russ. He made Russ move his big sneakers as he sat down by the opposite window. Summer moved to sit next to Slick, but Slick put his feet up next to Russ's so that the two jocks filled their row like bookends.

Slick looked up at her as if he didn't even know her. "Girls go in the way back," he said with a jerk of his thumb.

Dave laughed and reached over the seat to high-five.

I don't believe it! thought Summer, trying to keep the hurt from showing in her face. As if he hadn't just gone out of his way to seduce her off that bus!

"I'm going to catch some z's," Slick muttered. He was folding his sweatshirt into a pillow. He closed his eyes.

Summer was trying to think of a withering comeback to zing him with, but Missy saved her. She was waving her arms wildly. "Sit with us!" Missy begged. "Sit with us!"

"Don't pay him any attention," Belinda whispered in Summer's ear as she sat down on the carpet in the way back. "Russ is sacking out too, in case you didn't notice. I decided to let him sleep now. I'll fix him later."

"I'll bet you will," Summer said. She grinned. Bossy Belinda. She was always plotting something, and usually it involved getting revenge on her poor boyfriend, whether he had done anything wrong or not.

Belinda nodded toward the front row. "Never in a million years," she reminded Summer in a whisper.

"Oh, don't worry," Summer whispered back, "I only said yes so I could be with you guys."

"Uh-huh," said Belinda.

Summer reddened. Her excuse *did* sound lame. "Belinda, I know I'm not going to fall for him again, that's why it's okay for me to ride in the van."

"Uh-huh," Belinda said again.

Missy was grinning at her idiotically. She reached over Belinda and patted Summer's knee. She mouthed the words, "He picked you!" making a face of barely restrained glee.

Summer nodded. "Yup."

And for the zillionth time, she'd been fool enough to fall for him.

***

Whenever the Carville varsity cheerleading team did the pyramid at halftime, Summer was on the second tier from the top. It was a good position. She only had to support one girl. But as the van jounced along through the darkness she could still feel the sore spot where the bony right knee of Arlene Kerdell, the top girl, had dug into her back.

She closed her eyes. Two could play at this game. If Slick was going to sleep, she'd pretend to sleep as well.

Not that she thought she'd be able to sleep with Slick lying only five yards away. Despite the calm expression on Summer's oval face, her heart was beating like a hummingbird's wings.

Then again, she was more tired than she realized, and the gentle rocking of the van was making her...

The van bounced her to sleep—and awake again. And as Summer slipped in and out of consciousness, the stormy sky outside the van turned inky black.

***

When Summer woke up, it seemed like the old van was rattling more than it should be. Like they were driving over dirt roads.

Strange. There weren't any dirt roads on the ride up.

That wasn't all. The rain sounded like someone was drumming right on her head.

Summer opened her eyes. She quickly wiped her mouth where she had drooled, glancing up ahead to make sure no one had seen.

It was dark as a cave inside the cabin of the van. She could see the back of Russ and Slick's heads, both asleep as they leaned against opposite windows in the front row. Farther up, the windshield wipers were slashing back and forth nervously, but doing little to clear away the downpour. Teddy was hunched over a large map which he was studying with a flashlight from the glove compartment. And beside him... Summer could tell that Coach was super-tense just by the bristly back of his neck. Then she heard him curse.

Coach glanced over at Teddy accusingly. Teddy kept his curly head down.

Summer looked to her right. Belinda and Missy were both sleeping. Missy was totally out of it, head back, mouth hanging slackly, her long,

blond braids bouncing around as the van took another jolt.

Summer sat up straighter and leaned over the seat ahead of her, looking down. Dave was asleep as well. She sat back just as the van hit a ditch and jolted her hard. She bit her tongue. She moaned softly until the pain passed. She tasted blood.

The bump had been violent enough to wake Belinda. She sat up and stretched. Then she looked out the back window of the van and started violently.

"Uh, guys!" called Belinda, turning around to face the front. "I don't see the bus!"

Summer turned sharply. It was dark outside, and mostly what she could see was the little patch of dirt road lit by the van's rear headlights. But Belinda was right. The bus was gone.

Missy opened her eyes. "The bus got lost?" she asked.

"No," Summer said, glancing at her watch. "The bus is probably back at school by now. *We're* lost."

"Don't be saying that, girl," Belinda said, shaking her head.

"We're lost," Summer repeated.

"No, don't be saying that," Belinda insisted, "because my mom gets really furious if I'm home late and I'm not going to catch it for somebody else's mistake. I am not!"

On top of the seat ahead of them, a hand appeared. Followed by Dave's handsome head. Some girls thought Dave was better looking than Slick. He had these all-American looks, with soft, wavy red hair and clean-scrubbed freckly skin, like the skin of a beautiful polished apple. He did nothing for Summer, though. Which was a relief. Two people in the world who could boil her blood like Slick did? It would probably kill her.

At the sight of her boyfriend, Missy squealed loudly and threw her arms around his neck. "Dave!" She showered him with kisses.

He grinned but leaned back so he was out of reach. "Did I hear someone say lost?" he asked.

Slick, whose light-brown hair was indeed slick at the moment (it was still wet from the shower and the rain) turned his head to look back at his teammate. "Yeah," he said, "looks like Buzzy blew it again."

"I did not blow it!" Teddy insisted from the front, where he was still wrestling with the map. "There was supposed to be a sign for the turnoff to Route 107. Someone must have taken the sign down."

This excuse was met with a blast of laughter from almost everyone in the van. Poor Teddy, thought Summer, he could never do anything right. In one famous incident last spring, Slick had spread the word that Friday the 13th would be Dress-Up-Weird Day. Everyone was supposed to wear a crazy costume. But then the principal got wind of it and told Slick he'd get suspended if he went ahead with the plan. So

Slick spread the word, dress normal. Somehow, poor Buzzy didn't get the message. He was the only kid at Carville who arrived in costume. That Friday, he came to school wearing an orange dress and a fright wig. He was sent home.

"Hey, Buzz-meister!" Dave called. "You sure we're going the right way?"

Teddy didn't answer.

"Oh, Buzz-ee..." Dave repeated.

"We're not lost," Teddy called back, but Summer could tell by the tension in his voice that he was lying.

"That's the *only* reason I let you ride in the van," Coach growled. "You can't play sports, the least you could do is get us home on time. Now look what you did!"

Teddy's voice, which was already high, went up even further as he yelled, "I'm telling you, there was no sign! Okay? It's not my fault!"

"It never is, now is it, Buzzy?" Slick asked. And then he started the chant. "Buzz-ee, Buzz-ee, Buzz-ee!"

Everyone but Russ and Summer picked up the chant at once. "BUZZ-EE! BUZZ-EE! BUZZ-EE!" The van rocked with the noise.

"Cut that out!" Teddy squawked furiously.

Summer swatted Belinda, then leaned over Belinda to grab Missy's hand. "C'mon, guys, stop it," Summer said.

"Whoa," said Dave, "so Miss Cynic is worried about Buzzy, eh?"

Slick was looking right at her. "Summer and Buzzy sitting in a tree," he called, and everyone finished the new cheer together. "K-I-S-S-I-N-G."

There was an earsplitting whistle. "That's enough!" Coach barked. "We're lost here, team. Blaming Buzzy isn't going to help us any." He paused a moment, then added in his usual growl, "Even if it *is* all his fault!"

That set Teddy yelling again and started everyone in the van laughing and clapping. And it wasn't a whistle which quieted them this time. It was a thunderclap, so loud it sounded as if a bomb had gone off inside the car.

Coach swore. "Buzzy!" he shouted. "Do you have any idea where we are?!"

Teddy didn't answer. All the way from the way back, Summer could tell that the poor guy was crying.

"Oh, for pete's sake," Coach said. He hated people crying almost more than he hated anything else, Summer knew. Though Summer's brother Michael said that the year they lost the first-place trophy in the final seconds of the last game, he found Coach in his office, blubbering like a baby.

Coach must have been stepping on the gas, because the van was

jolting harder over the deep holes and ruts in the road.

That was Coach Wardell's solution to all problems. More offense. If you're behind, throw more passes. If you're lost, drive faster.

It was a strategy that had paid off well for Coach over the years. He'd never had a losing season. But right now they were in the middle of a downpour so thick that you couldn't see where the road ended and the forest began. And everyone was yelling at Teddy and Teddy was yelling back.

Slick suddenly yelled, "Hey, Buzzy, catch!"

He had picked up a practice football off the van floor; he spiraled it right at the back of Teddy's head. Teddy turned just in time to see the ball coming, but not in time to do anything about it. His reflexes had never been the greatest. The ball bonked him right on the forehead with a thud that was, even Summer had to admit, pretty funny.

Then the ball caromed off Teddy's head and right in front of Coach.

Who lost control of the wheel.

The van careened off the narrow road, hurtled down a culvert, and zoomed straight at a tree....

Jason

Summer was screaming as—

The huge old tree jumped up to meet them and—

SMASSSSHHHHHHHHH!!!!

Wood splintered. Metal crunched. Everyone went flying. Summer flew forward like a rag doll. She felt her teeth crunch as her chin was gashed against the metal ashtray open on the back of the seat in front of her. And then, except for the loud drumming of the rain on the van's metal roof, everything fell strangely silent.

***

At that same moment, the drumming of the rain was covering up another, more sinister, sound. It was a low and awful moan—the anguished cry of a spirit awakened from its slumbers.

The cry came from the old oak tree.

Where—

Buried deep inside the battered trunk—

There lay a white and oval mask.

***

Summer felt a hand on her arm, gently pulling her upright. "You okay?" She saw Belinda's concerned face.

"Yeah."

The van was at an angle, pointing down like a roller-coaster car stopped mid-ride. Everything was confused in Summer's brain. It was like her mind was taking snapshots. Missy crying. Dave, leaning back over the seat, trying to comfort her. Coach slowly lifting his head off the wheel. Teddy sitting upright, the only one in the van who had been wearing a seat belt. Russ, who must have rolled right off his seat, climbing back up. And then her head cleared enough for her to really panic as she cried out, "*Slick!*" He climbed into view, twisting his neck from side to side. He grinned. "What?" he asked casually.

Even in the middle of all the confusion, Summer desperately regretted having yelled his name like that. She had spilled the beans for good. She had shown him how she felt.

Coach turned around. His round, bowling-ball head was scrunched up and red with worry, and there was a nasty cut across the bridge of his nose. "Everyone okay?"

"Yeah," said Slick, "but if you wanted to wake us up, why didn't you

just blow your whistle?"

There was nervous laughter. Even Coach joined in. But then he swore. He turned and stared at Teddy, as if he had forgotten all about him. His face turned white with rage. "What's the matter with you, Bateman? Are you insane, throwing a ball at me like that?"

"Me?!" squeaked Teddy. "Slick threw it at my head! It bounced onto you!"

"Okay, okay," grumbled Coach, "nobody likes a tattletale."

The engine had died. Coach turned the key. Nothing. He tried the ignition a second time. A third. And a fourth. There was an awful stillness in the van now.

Coach carefully opened his door. "Everyone stay right where you are," he ordered. He got out and went to look at the engine. But he couldn't open the hood. It was crunched against the tree. He banged on the hood, obviously furious.

"He's going to kill you, Buzzy," Slick said, poking the back of Teddy's head.

Teddy spun hard, grabbing Slick's hand, but Coach was coming back inside the van now. Teddy let go.

Coach tried the ignition a couple of times more. Then he sat still, staring straight ahead; everyone knew enough to be quiet.

"Well," Coach said finally, "we're up the creek, boys. I'm going to go get help. I want everyone to stay inside the van until I get back. Understood? I'm serious now. Those are strict orders."

Coach glared at Teddy, who was crying again, his slight shoulders going up and down. "Except for you," Coach muttered. "If you want to go off somewhere and get yourself eaten by some wild bear or something, be my guest."

There were titters of laughter. Slick poked at Teddy again. Then Coach stepped out into the rain and carefully closed the door shut again.

How can I be in love with someone as cruel as Slick? wondered Summer.

But she was.

***

"Hey, Donny, look at this," Stu whispered nervously.

Donny didn't answer. He was about thirty yards deeper into the cave than his friend, and while the dark cavern was deathly silent—except for an occasional dripping sound—Donny hadn't heard his friend calling.

Donny was busy with a discovery of his own.

He had found a craggy hole in the wall of the cave. The hole led to an even deeper cavern. Cold air was seeping menacingly out of the hole,

fingering its way under Donny's Red Devil bowling T-shirt and down his camouflage pants. He bent down, aiming his flashlight through the hole. He was thinking, *Cool!*

Stu yelled, "Donny!"

Donny jerked up so suddenly he thought he was going to have a heart attack. "What?!"

He turned back, playing his flashlight around the dark grotto until he found Stu. His flashlight lit up the back of Stu's white porkpie hat. Standing right up against the glistening cave wall, Stu looked for all the world like a little boy made to stand in the corner by his teacher. He was shining his own flashlight against a spot high on the wall.

"What is it?!" Donny called.

"I don't know," Stu said, "it looks like some kind of writing."

Donny felt his heart sink. "Writing?!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

Stu kept studying the wall. "Uh, pretty sure, yeah."

Donny swore.

Stu turned, squinting against the bright beam of Donny's flashlight. "Why? What's wrong?"

Donny clicked off his torch. "Well, that just ruins it, don't you see?" He started tromping back over the rock floor to where Stu stood. "I mean, here we hike all the way up this mountain and all the way back into this cave, and what do we find? Graffiti! Like there've been hundreds of guys here before us."

Stu giggled. "Just take a look, would ya? There. See it?"

Donny pointed his flashlight at the same spot where Stu was pointing his. He was hoping Stu was wrong. But sure enough, a word appeared to have been scratched into the rock face in a thin, scraggly line:

"Yeah," murmured Donny thoughtfully. "Looks like it says 'noso!' or something."

For a moment, both men were silent amid the drip-drip-dripping stillness of the vast, dark cave.

"Noso!" Stu said. "That mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing. C'mon, let's keep going. I want to be able to say we hiked all the way to the back of this sucker."

Donny led the way, both men ducking their heads to avoid getting scraped by the overhanging stalactites, which pointed down from the low cavern roof like daggers. They reached a wall. Stu smiled in the darkness, and though Donny could only barely see him, he could tell it was a smile of relief.

"Well, looks like we did it," Stu said. "Looks like we reached the end of the line."

"Uhn-uh, buddy." Donny shone his flashlight along the wall. "Not quite. Look what *I* found."

Donny was shining his light on the small, dark hole he had found earlier. Stu cursed. "Aw, Donny, look... we've gone far enough. I mean, I don't even know if I can fit through that thing."

"You want to turn back?" Donny was enjoying this. Let Stu beg, he thought.

"No way," Stu said quickly. "Unless, of course... Look, we could agree that we'll tell everybody we went all the way."

Donny guffawed. "You are such a coward. What's the matter, Stu? You worried about that birdseed that trooper dropped on us? About some zombie in a hockey mask?"

Stu laughed, like he was trying to show how silly a notion *that* was.

"You wait here if you like," Donny said nastily. He started crawling through the small, dark hole.

"I'm right behind you," Stu said, but his voice wavered.

***

Donny was having quite a time wriggling his way through that stupid hole. Stu had to push on his friend's big, fat ass. Finally, Donny disappeared from sight. There was a loud metal clunk. Stu heard Donny curse.

"What's wrong?" Stu asked, his voice dropping to a whisper again.

"Dropped my flash."

"Oh. Is it broken?"

"Uh-huh." Donny cursed again. "Man, it's like an icebox in here. And I can't see a thing. Hand me your flash."

Stu hesitated. If he handed Donny his flashlight, that was going to leave *him* totally in the dark. Stu wasn't the crazy fool who had insisted on going further, so why should he be penalized? But Donny's hand was reaching back through the hole now and grabbing at his pants leg.

"C'mon!" hissed Donny.

Stu placed his flashlight carefully in Donny's hand. The hand, and the flash, disappeared. Then came silence. A deep and deathly silence.

In the silence, Stu had a revelation. It sent a wave of prickling goosebumps all over his scalp, his neck, his bare arms. His voice cracked as he asked, "Donny?"

"Yeah?" came Donny's voice from the other side of the cave wall. The voice was a little muffled now. Donny must have moved deeper into the cave.

"Noso!" Stu called. "I think I just figured out what it means."

This time, Donny didn't answer.

"What was the name of that boy?" Stu called. "The one the trooper said drowned in the lake? It was Jason, wasn't it?"

"How do I know?" Donny called back, his voice faint. "Anyway, what's the difference? Get over here, would you? You got to see this. There are more wall markings in here. Oh, wow! I'm telling you. It's like some kind of shrine."

Stu felt woozy in the knees. "Donny, I think we should get out of here. Donny? That writing back there, it says *Jason*, Donny, only it's written upside down. Why would someone write upside down, Donny?"

As if in response, there was a sound—well, not so much a sound as a beating of the air—on the other side of the cave wall.

"Donny?"

Still no answer.

"Donny!!!"

But the only answer from the next cavern was the beating of hundreds and hundreds of tiny wings. It was answer enough for Stu. He scurried back from the hole, tripped, almost fell. He whirled but the room was so dark he couldn't tell which way he was going. He only knew he had to get out, get out at once.

But he couldn't see a thing without his flashlight. He groped around wildly, his hands in front of him.

One hand touched something furry.

He screamed and started to run.

A mistake.

He banged facefirst into a rock wall. His head rang like a bell.

Putting his hands out, he held on to the wall as if it could somehow hold him, protect him, save him. He turned himself slowly around, so that his back was to the wall. This position felt slightly safer. He licked his lips. He tasted blood. He listened, straining his ears, but except for the ever-present sounds of dripping water, the cave was silent once more.

Drip... drip... drip...

He began inching along the wall, feeling with his hand for the large opening that led back to the next grotto, and the grotto after that, and eventually—he prayed—to safety. He just had to take it on blind faith that he was going in the right direction, that he—

He stopped cold, listening again, listening not just with his ears, but with every pore of his skin.

He felt like something big was coming toward him. As if part of the darkness in the room had broken free and was flying right at his head.

He was so sure he was about to be attacked, he covered his face with both hands, bracing himself for the blow.

No blow came.

And after a moment, he was ready to move again. He took his hands down.

Maybe his eyes had adjusted to the terrible darkness of the room, because he thought he saw the way now, the way out. He'd walk straight ahead, right across the cavern and—

Go! he shouted at himself. But he was too scared to move. And while he hesitated...

The large and hideous vampire bat, which had landed on the cave wall above his head, sank its fangs deep into his neck.

Leaving the Nest

"Where are you going?" Teddy asked Summer, his voice cracking. He pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his beaky nose.

"Outside," she said, trying not to sound too sarcastic.

She was standing in front of the open doorway of the van, staring out into the rain and darkness. She felt like a parachutist about to jump out of a plane. Of course, she immediately imagined that her chute wouldn't open, and saw herself leaping to her death.

For the first ten minutes after Coach had left, they had all followed his orders and waited inside the van. But then Slick had climbed out into the rain. Followed by Dave, then Missy, then Belinda, and then Russ. Summer felt bad leaving Teddy behind, but Slick had gone outside, and the guy was like a magnet, pulling her toward him wherever he went.

"You come out too," Summer told Teddy. She dropped down onto the wet grass.

"Wow," Dave was saying, "look at that."

He was examining the wreckage. The front of the van had crumpled like an accordion against the trunk of the tree. There was a nasty gash in the tree too, where you could see naked wood. But the tree had gotten the better of the fight. The van was a mess.

"No way he's going to get this thing started again," Russ said.

"*You* start it," Belinda ordered him. Russ only laughed.

The rain was coming down in buckets now, but the woods were thick, it didn't feel too bad. The thick leaves broke up the downpour on the way down.

"This way," Slick said. He led the group a few yards into the forest and leaned back against a tree.

"Hey, guys," Teddy said. He was sticking his head out of the tilted van. "Are you all nuts? It's a lightning storm. The only grounded place is the van. Rubber tires, remember? Under a tree is the worst place to stand. You could get hit by a lightning bolt."

"Yeah," agreed Slick. "And you could get good-looking."

"C'mon, Slick," Summer said in a low voice, "ease up on him. He feels bad enough already."

"He should feel bad," Slick said.

"Why?" asked Summer. "Oh, yeah, I forgot. Coach says Teddy caused the accident by letting you bean him."

Slick gave her a blank stare, which she knew meant he was annoyed. Good. Maybe if she could stay nasty to him, she'd have a chance of keeping him at arm's length. To retaliate, he pressed his forefinger into

the center of her forehead and gave her head a little push.

"Well, this is dumb," Belinda complained. "Standing around here like a bunch of wet rats. Russ, go get help."

Everyone laughed.

"Yeah, Russ," Slick said. "Go fetch."

Russ was looking at Belinda, and there was anger in his eyes. But he pulled his gray sweatshirt hood up over his head and started tramping up the culvert toward the dirt road.

"Where are you going?" Belinda demanded.

Russ turned back and gave her a look of exaggerated patience. "You just told me to go."

"Yeah, but where are you going to go?" she asked.

He thought for a second, looking back up at the road. "Coach went to the right. I guess I'll go left."

"Brilliant," said Belinda.

"You got a better idea?" Russ demanded.

That shushed her, which was a rare thing where Belinda was concerned. He was probably glad to get away from her, thought Summer. Belinda nagged him pretty hard.

Another relationship that's not going to last long, Summer observed to herself.

Missy was clinging to Dave like a vine. He pulled her hands free and started after Russ, calling, "I'll come with you, man."

But Missy wailed, "Dave!" and hurried after him. She got one arm around his neck again. "Don't leave me alone in the woods," she whined.

"Alone? What are you talking about?" Dave asked, stopping. He nodded back at Belinda and Summer and Slick.

Missy pouted. "I want to go with Davey," she said in her baby voice. Missy used that baby voice way too much, Summer thought. It was like nails on the chalkboard for Summer and Belinda; she could just imagine what it would do to a hunky guy like Dave.

He shook free of Missy's grasp. "Slick!" he called.

Slick looked up and nodded slightly in response. It was his "What?" nod.

"You want to come?" Dave called.

Summer knew why Dave was asking. He wanted someone to run interference between him and Missy. Quarterback and receiver, still calling special plays two hours after the game.

Slick jerked a thumb at Belinda and Summer. "I don't want to leave the ladies."

"They've got Buzzy to protect them," Dave said.

"Thanks a lot," Belinda called back.

"Coach said we were all supposed to stay in the van," Teddy

reminded them from the van's open door.

Slick ignored him. He looked at Summer. He was still sore at her for sticking up for Teddy, she could tell, and she was no longer feeling so self-righteous about it. The guy was a louse, through and through, and yet she still couldn't help feeling miserable when he disapproved of her even slightly.

"You want to do a little sightseeing?" he asked her.

She nodded, and started after him.

"Well I'm not staying here by myself, that's for sure," said Belinda. "Hold on."

Belinda climbed back into the van. A moment later, she came back out with her purple Lands' End backpack (monogrammed B.F.K for Belinda Faye Karras in silver reflector letters), Summer's blue American Airlines gym bag (her dad was a pilot, so they always had all this A.A. stuff) and Missy's knit drawstring bag (Missy was always knitting stuff for Dave—even this bag was a sweater for Dave that had gone too wrong to save).

"We're just going down the road, Belinda," Slick said. "How many supplies do you need?"

Belinda glowered at him. "I don't go nowhere without my stuff."

"He ordered us to stay in the van," Teddy was saying as they all started up the hill. "Don't expect me to stick up for you when he starts chewing you out. I'm not taking the heat on this one."

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do," Slick told him.

Summer gave Teddy a sympathetic glance. "We won't be gone long," she said.

But then Slick had her by the hand, helping her up the ravine, and at the touch of his skin against hers, all other thoughts flew right out of her head.

***

The rain was perfect. It would help wash away the tracks.

The trooper had parked the car down by the edge of the vast, gray lake. The sheet of water was jumping now as the rain pelted down like gunfire.

The trooper popped the glove compartment. He took out the pair of white plastic surgical gloves he had filched last night from the county morgue. He flicked them on, snapping them into place, then flexed his fingers, stretching the shiny white plastic. He reached under the dash for the button that released the trunk.

Thanks to a high-speed chase with some drunk, backwoods maniacs three months back, there were four big bullet holes in that trunk. So the trooper wasn't too worried about his cargo.

He walked out into the rain and raised the trunk lid—

And there they were. Side by side, just like he had left them, packed into the trunk like a couple of sardines.

His two passengers were both bound and gagged. He peered down at their faces. They looked a little groggy but not dead. Definitely not dead.

He'd take care of that in a minute.

He reached for his wife first, swinging her bound legs up and out of the trunk. He pulled on the legs hard, which meant her body scraped against the trunk's metal mouth. He grunted as he worked, as he might when moving any heavy package. When her legs were hanging outside the trunk, he reached down and pulled her up by her shoulders, until she was standing upright.

The trooper's wife was not a tall woman. His pet name for her was Tiny. Tiny Tina. He had always towered over her. Right now she was looking up at him with those large, dark eyes of hers, eyes that were filled with terror and pleading.

Too late for that, the trooper thought grimly.

Her legs were bound together, so as he pulled her across the sandy beach, she had to take comical baby-steps to try to keep her balance. He dragged her several yards, then pushed her down roughly, so that she landed on her bum. He laughed at the look of shock in her eyes.

Then he returned to the trunk for his other package. Cliff. The tall architect with the sandy hair and the craggy, handsome features. Cliff, his best friend, who was supposed to be designing a new addition for their little house. But that had meant that Cliff spent hours at the trooper's home, hours alone with Tina, conferring on the building plans.

They had had some pretty wild conferences, Tina and Cliff.

The trooper stood in front of the open trunk, looking down at his friend. Cliff's eyes met his. The trooper saw the same fear he had seen in his wife's eyes, but there was also a lot of calculating going on here. Cliff, the architect, always planning and plotting. And right now, the trooper knew, Cliff was plotting his escape.

The trooper suddenly raised his fist. He could have killed him right there. Could have just pummeled Cliff to death. Beaten the craggy good looks right out of that face.

Cliff flinched, trying to roll away from the blow. That was enough to bring the trooper back to his senses. As pleasurable as it was going to be to kill Cliff, he had to put it off a few minutes longer, otherwise he would spoil his entire plan.

He reached down, grabbing a handful of Cliff's black sweater, and pulled the man up hard. Cliff's head banged against the side of the trunk.

"Oh, sorry, Cliff," the trooper said. "I should be careful of your

feelings." He allowed himself the pleasure of banging his friend's head one more time, then dragged him from the car.

He took his wife up to the woods first, propping her against a tree trunk. Then Cliff. It was a lot harder work dragging Cliff; his work boots made deep tracks in the wet sand. The trooper made a mental note for later. One of the things he'd have to clean up.

He had set up his wife and her lover so they were facing each other. "Okay," he said, clapping his hands. "Let's get to work, guys. You two are going to have a little fight. A lovers' quarrel, as they say. First, Tina, what you're going to do is"—he lifted his wife's bound arms so that her hands brushed Cliff's face—"you're going to claw Cliff a little bit."

He moved her hands back and forth across Cliff's face, but Tina kept her fingers bent so that her nails didn't scratch her lover's skin. That made the trooper mad all over again. Was she still acting lovey-dovey after everything that had happened?

He grabbed her fingers so harshly that she groaned; the sound came out even with the gag on. The trooper crooked several of her fingers so that the long nails pointed at Cliff's face like weapons. Then he dug the nails hard into Cliff's face. Cliff was trying to turn his head away, but he couldn't maneuver very well, not with the trooper keeping one boot firmly planted on his legs. Using Tina's nails, the trooper clawed Cliff's face until it was bloody.

Tina raised her bloody nails toward her husband, not to scratch, to beg. She whimpered through the gag.

"Ohhhh, you want to scratch him more?" the trooper asked, feigning surprise. "But Tiny, I thought you loved him?"

Her pleading and whimpering increased. But the trooper was staring down at his rubber-gloved hands in disbelief. He had forgotten something. "I'll be right back," he said. He grinned down at them nervously. "Don't go away."

He hurried back toward the car, glancing up once or twice to make sure they weren't running away. Even though their legs were tied, he felt awfully jumpy, like something could go wrong at any instant. Tiny and Cliff were crawling around, desperately trying to work their way free of their ropes. But they didn't look like they were having any success. The trooper opened the passenger side and retrieved the white hockey mask, then trotted back up the wet beach, running through the driving rain.

"Forgot the mask," he explained in a friendly voice as he stood over Cliff and Tina. Then he yanked Cliff back up against his tree, making sure Cliff's head snapped back against the trunk. He took hold of Cliff's hair, pulling his head down, then slipped the black strap of the mask over the back of his friend's head.

"You see, guys," he said. "Folks around here really believe all that

crap about the Jason monster. They're terrified, my friends. So when they find your dead bodies, you know what they're going to think? They're going to think you put on the mask, Cliff."

Cliff was trying to get to his feet. The trooper put a fist on top of his head, then raised it like a hammer and clubbed him back down. "That's what everyone thinks happened to this summer's Fourth of July carnival, now don't they?" asked the trooper. "You've heard the rumors. Some fool mechanic put on Jason's mask and went berserk, 'cause he was possessed by Jason's evil spirit."

He had to give Cliff another shot with his fist. "Well, it's not so farfetched, now is it?" he asked. "After all, Tiny, you said it yourself. It was like your *love*"—he clubbed Cliff again—"for each other just *possessed*"—he hit him again—"you like a demon!"

More garbled begging from Tiny Tina. The trooper felt a sudden impulse to punch his wife in the head. He restrained himself, though. Instead, he lifted Cliff's bound arms and swung them together like a bat. So it was Cliff's hands that knocked his wife on the chin, snapping her head back. And it was on Cliff's hands that the coroner would find Tina's blood.

Next he reached in his holster and took out... Cliff's gun.

At the sight of the gun, Cliff's gray eyes widened with terror; the trooper could see the fear behind the dark eyeholes of the white mask. "The only bad thing about this plan," said the trooper, "is that you're going to get to have all the fun, Cliffie."

He kneeled down beside his friend and put the gun in his hands, keeping a firm hold on it. Then he lifted the gun, pointing right at Tina.

It was amazing how much noise that little woman was able to make with a gag on. She was going crazy, wriggling and crying and begging and pleading. It reminded the trooper of the passion he had witnessed between her and Cliff that day last week when he had that stomach virus and came home in the middle of his afternoon shift. Yessir, what he had seen that day had sure stayed in his head, gnawing away at him like a vicious little rodent.

He squeezed Cliff's finger—and the trigger.

The bullet caught Tina right in the chest. That stopped her begging and pleading once and for all.

Crying Wolf

The trooper could see the little dark hole where the bullet had pierced his wife's tan leather jacket. He could see the blood oozing out. Her eyes were still open but her breathing was very labored and shallow.

The trooper got to his feet. Immediately, Cliff raised the gun and pointed it right at him.

The trooper shook his head. "Cliff," he said. "I'm surprised at you. You were always such a sensitive guy."

Cliff fired.

But instead of a blast, the gun just clicked, and it clicked again and again each time Cliff pulled the trigger. The trooper laughed. "You guys really thought I was stupid, huh? Just a dumb old cop huh? You thought I'd put more than one bullet in there? More than one bullet for Tiny Tina?"

The trooper reached in his pocket and pulled out his wife's little pistol. It was a dainty woman's gun with a white mother-of-pearl handle. Three years ago he had insisted his wife start keeping the gun in her bedside table; another dead body had been found—in pieces—in the Crystal Lake woods. Back then, he had worried about his wife's well-being.

He felt a little of that old tenderness as he reached down and put the gun in his dying wife's hands. They were cold, those hands. In better years, these little hands had caressed his cheeks so kindly. Well, no more.

He curled his wife's right forefinger over the trigger and aimed the gun at—

Cliff was getting to his feet. He had gotten his legs free!

The trooper tried to fire his wife's gun, but now his wife pulled the gun away from him. She wasn't dead! So he had to wrestle with her first. That wasn't too hard. She could barely breathe. He got control of the gun again. Still keeping his wife's finger on the trigger, he turned to fire at Cliff.

But Cliff was several yards away, and there were trees in between. The trooper squeezed off one shot, but the bullet pinged into the trunk of a pine. Cliff kept running.

The trooper cursed loudly. He pulled the pistol out of his wife's hands so roughly that he broke her finger. Then he started off into the dark forest in pursuit of his best friend.

***

Summer was really starting to enjoy being out in the forest. There was this dark, lush, vegetable smell in the air, like ripe fruit. And the way the rain was coming down. It was plastering her parka to her body, soaking her jeans, running down her face and making her lick her lips. It never rained this hard when you lived in town. You had to be out in the woods to really get into the heart of nature.

Missy was up ahead, skipping around puddles, playing a kind of hopscotch on the muddy road. "Push 'em back, push 'em back," she chanted, "wayyyyy back!" She tossed an imaginary baton up in the rain-dark air, pretended to catch it. Then she marched backward, smiling at the rest of the group. Summer smiled back.

"I don't like this," Belinda called. "Where are we, anyway?"

"The woods," Slick told her, and slapped his leg as if he had made a brilliant joke.

Dave picked up a rock and tossed it to Slick, who lobbed it back, right over Russ's head. The big linebacker casually reached up a hand like a paw and caught the rock. "Intercepted," he said.

"Am I the only one who's got a brain left here?" Belinda demanded. "You guys are acting like this is some kind of party."

Slick squinted at her through the downpour. "What do you want us to do?"

"Find someone who can help us!" Belinda squealed. "I want to get home in this lifetime."

Slick just laughed. "Hey, Russ," he said. "Your girlfriend wants us to find someone who can help us."

Russ looked pained. "We're trying," he told Belinda.

"HELLO!" Dave shouted at the woods, cupping his hands to his mouth. "ANYBODY HOME?!"

As if in response, a streak of lightning cracked down through the dark sky, briefly turning the air a ghostly white.

They walked on. The muddy road seemed to curve endlessly through the woods. So far they hadn't seen a single turnoff or even a trail. What if they walked and walked and never found a house? Instantly, Summer imagined them all walking until they turned into skeletons. Another lovely image, courtesy of yours truly, she told herself.

"I hope we don't get lost," Missy worried.

"Missy," Summer said patiently, "we've been walking straight since we left the van. We haven't turned once. How can we get lost?"

"Well, I still hope we don't get lost." Missy looked around, apparently trying to orient herself. "That big hill is on our left," she said. She pointed at a dark hill that loomed ominously above them. Then Missy looked to her right... and stopped. "Hey," she said. She left the dirt road and started wading through the thick weeds and brush.

"Missy," Belinda said impatiently. "It's raining."

"I know," said Missy, squatting down in the weeds.

"What's she doing?" snickered Slick. "Making pee-pee?"

"I found a sign," Missy said.

Summer tramped off the road toward Missy. She was kneeling in front of a wooden sign with carved letters.

WELCOME TO CAMP CRYSTAL LAKE.

Missy looked up at her, giving her a proud smile. Her skin was glistening with rainwater. She jumped up. "I found a camp!" she said, clapping her hands. "I found a camp! We're saved! We're saved! You see, Dave? I'm not so dumb, after all."

Though he tried to pull his head back, Missy managed to plant a loud smacker on her boyfriend's cheek.

"Oh, wow," Slick said when he saw the wooden sign. He suddenly looked very serious. He looked off at the trail that led into the woods. "This is awesomely bad," he said.

By now, all eyes were on the rangy receiver.

He's got them all fooled, thought Summer. She had known him long enough to be able to distinguish among his many fake looks. From the serious look on his face right now, she knew he was about to tell a whopper.

"Oh wow, what?" Missy said. She bit her lip.

"You guys never heard of Camp Crystal Lake?" asked Slick.

Missy shook her head from side to side, shaking her braids.

Slick scratched his head. "Oh, boy," he said. "Well, I don't want to scare you." He started to walk back to the road, but Russ put out a hand to stop him. The big linebacker pushed the slim receiver back effortlessly.

"Let's hear it," Russ said. He crossed his arms.

"Some people were killed here," Slick said.

"Yeah, right," Belinda said.

"I'm not kidding," Slick said. "This place is like haunted or something. It's murder central. A kid drowned at this camp. And he keeps coming back from the grave."

"Slick," Missy shrieked, "stop it! You're scaring me!"

"Me too," Belinda said.

"That's not all," said Slick. "When he comes back, he wears this white hockey mask, to hide how rotted his face is. Well, they say that if you put that mask on, then he's got you. You know, like possessed."

"That's enough now," Belinda said in a low voice.

Slick ignored her. "They had a carnival here this summer. But it was built on hallowed ground, 'cause it was built on the site of Jason's murder. So when they drilled down and dug out the foundations for the rides, the rides got possessed. The whole place burned to the ground.

They say the only thing that survived from the whole fair were the fake vampire bats from the funhouse. See, these bats—"

"Guys," Summer said, stepping in front of Slick and holding up her hands. "Before he gets you any more jazzed, let me explain something about Slick here. Our very first date, he took me to a horror movie. I wasn't scared, right? So he leans over and whispers in my ear that he just saw a big rat run under my feet. I start screaming. But he won't let me go. So I spent the whole movie with my arms around his neck."

Slick had started laughing as soon as he heard what story she was going to tell. And by the time she finished the story, everyone else had joined in. Summer went on, "What I'm trying to say is, Slick loves to scare people."

Slick aimed a finger at her like a gun. "You got me," he said.

"Wait a minute," Russ said. "You mean—that wasn't true what you said? About the murders?"

"Nah," said Slick, shaking his head.

"And you've never heard of Crystal Lake or Camp Crystal Lake, right?" asked Belinda, sounding like the lawyer she someday planned to be.

"Right."

Belinda punched Russ's big biceps. "Russ, how come you let him scare us like this?"

"Belinda," Russ said wearily. "Not everything is my fault."

"Wait a minute," Missy said, stamping her foot. "I'm getting confused. Is it true about the camp or not?"

"Not," said Slick and Dave in unison.

"So then we should go look and see if there's someone at that camp who can help us," Missy said. "C'mon!"

And she charged off down the trail.

***

"I really think this is going to work," Dave said as he bent back a bony branch that had almost poked out his eye.

"Work? Something's going to work?" Summer asked behind him. Her mood had plummeted all over again, because Slick was up ahead, and paying her no attention.

"Yeah," said Dave. "I mean, if there is a camp here, there's got to be people."

"I don't know," Summer said. "September isn't exactly camp season."

"Oh, wow," Missy said, stopping short. Summer bumped into her. "I just got scared all over again," Missy said.

"Why?" Belinda demanded, sounding annoyed.

"I don't know. The thought of all these empty boarded-up cabins," Missy said, her voice a stage whisper. "Out in the middle of the woods.

Out in the middle of nowhere. Camp closed for the season." She shivered. "Oh, I'm scaring myself."

"Yeah, camp *is* a terrifying place," Slick agreed from up ahead. He was standing on a big, lichen-covered rock.

"Why couldn't we have gotten lost here during the summer?" Missy said. "Then there would have been loads of people around. And cute little kids doing arts and crafts and—"

"Don't worry," Dave said, cutting her off as he headed toward Slick's rock. "We probably won't find our way home till next summer, and by then camp will start up again."

"Stop!" cried Missy.

"Actually," said Slick, "there hasn't been any camp here for years. After all the killings, no one goes near the place."

"Don't start that stuff again," warned Belinda.

"I thought you said you were kidding," Missy said.

"He is," Dave told her.

"I am," Slick agreed.

Summer was starting to feel a little uneasy. Was he kidding about the camp or wasn't he?

The truth was, that was one of the keys to Slick's appeal: it was almost impossible to pin him down. On anything.

Suddenly, Slick jumped down off the rock and hurried back toward them along the narrow trail. He grabbed Summer's arm. That she didn't mind so much. But the look on his face, ever so serious and alert, worried her no end.

"What?" she asked.

"I hear something," he whispered.

Everyone was standing around in a tight cluster, frozen, listening hard. Summer's ears strained to pick up any sounds besides the drumming rain.

Then Missy screamed at the top of her lungs.

Summer was so scared, she grabbed Slick with both hands.

Everyone was staring at Missy with horror. She grinned sheepishly. "Sorry," she said with a guilty smile. "I couldn't stand the tension."

"You dorkhead," Belinda said. But she was smiling.

"C'mon," Russ said, leading the way down the trail.

"Hold on," Belinda said. She poked a finger into Slick's taut stomach. "You're the one who started this. What did you hear, exactly?"

"I don't know. I thought I heard someone following us."

"Uh-huh." Belinda started after Russ. "Russ," she said. "I want you to make him cut it out."

Summer and Slick both started down the trail together. But they stopped again when they saw that Missy and Dave weren't following them. Missy was looking at Dave.

Dave was looking terrified.

"Now *I* hear something," Dave said. His face looked ashen.

Summer felt the fear start all over again. But only for an instant. Dave grinned. "Gotcha," he said.

"Oh, you!" Missy fake-slapped him.

Dave was chuckling; so was Slick.

"You guys are a bunch of real jokesters," Belinda said sourly as the group all gathered again. "But you're going to get yours, let me tell you. Let me promise you. Right, Russ? Russ...?"

Russ still didn't answer. He was staring past them, back down the trail. "I hear something," he said.

Summer's first thought was that it was pretty lame of Russ to try this gag after Slick and Dave had just pulled it on them. There was no way he could fool them a third time.

"Oh now, don't *you* start," Belinda said. "I mean it, Russ Johnson. You start playing tricks on me, and you'll regret it so bad you won't know—"

Belinda stopped midsentence. She turned back and looked down the trail.

By now, Summer had heard it too.

Russ wasn't playing a gag.

This time there really was someone coming through the woods.

Whoever it was, they were thrashing through the wet brush.

Coming hard.

9

The Final Whistle

At first all Summer could see was the dark shape dodging around the trees.

"Hey, wait up!" a voice cried.

A high voice.

Teddy.

Summer felt the tension flow out of her body like rain as Teddy came running out of the woods. He was pushing his glasses up his nose, grinning at them nervously. His mass of curly hair hadn't lost its odd shape, even though it was sopping wet. "Hi," he said as everyone stared at him.

Missy took two giant steps toward him. She was taller than Teddy. She shook her finger in his face. "Idiot!" she said. "You scared us!" Then she walked back to the rest of the group.

"I scared you?" Teddy asked, surprised. He seemed proud of himself. "Cool."

"What are you doing here, Buzzy?" snapped Belinda.

"Oh, well, uh, I decided to come with you guys after all."

"What do you want?" asked Dave. "A medal?"

Slick flicked his head, shaking water off himself like a dog. "No way, Jose," he told Teddy.

"Why?" Teddy asked, a whine already starting in his voice. "What do you mean, no way?"

"Think about it, Buzzy," Slick said. "If you come with us, there's going to be no one at the van when Coach comes back. We need someone to wait there. And you already volunteered."

"I did not volunteer," Teddy said. As usual, he looked close to tears.

With four older brothers, Summer had been raised on a steady diet of teasing and ribbing and kidding around. She knew how to handle it. That's why her heart went out to Teddy. It was like the guy had no shell to protect himself. "Leave him alone, Slick," she said.

Slick ignored her. "Go back to the van," he ordered Teddy.

"Oh yeah? Well, what if I don't? I mean, you're not the principal."

"Look," Dave said. "We wouldn't be in this mess if it wasn't for you. So now you have to wait at the van. Don't be a jerk."

The guilt trip seemed to work. From the look on his face, Teddy felt defeated. "What are you guys going to do?" he asked.

"We're going to look for help," said Slick. "What do you think?"

"We'll be back soon," Russ said.

"Oh, yeah, like I believe that," Teddy said. "You guys are such a bunch of liars. You're going partying, aren't you?"

Slick laughed. "Partying? Are you out of your mind? Buzzy, take a look around you." He waved at the woods and the rain. "Does this look like a party to you?"

Teddy wasn't convinced. "Who's got the weed?" he asked.

Teddy was the kind of kid who always thought he was being left out of everything, and the truth was, he usually was.

"Buzzy, Buzzy, Buzzy-bee," Slick said sadly. "How hard did you hit your head in the accident? Use your brain, man. I mean, even if we had some weed with us, which we don't, how would we light the stuff in this rain?"

It wasn't a very good lie, and as soon as Slick said it, Summer knew he had drugs with him. Slick was quite the pothead. He had tried to get her to smoke marijuana more than once. She had always refused. Fact was, he didn't need to get her high to have his way with her. Slick himself—that was her drug. Him and that long, brooding face of his. She tried to remember back to earlier this afternoon, when she was sure she hated Slick forever. It seemed like years ago.

"Then everyone's got to come back to the van," Teddy said feebly. "Because I'm getting scared waiting all by myself."

No one answered.

"C'mon," he begged.

Dave and Slick both chorused back "Awww" at Teddy, and not in a nice way either.

"I'll wait with you," Summer said. She started walking back down the trail.

Teddy's mouth dropped open, but Slick grabbed Summer's hand. "No way," he told her.

"Why not?" she asked in a low voice. "You jealous?"

Don't look in his eyes, she told herself. Slick was like a hypnotist. If she looked too long into those deep pools of amber, she was a goner for sure.

"You're coming with us," he said. It was all he needed to say, too. The idea that Slick wanted her with him had its usual magical effect on her. She could feel herself going brain dead.

She turned away from him, looking back at poor, bedraggled Teddy. He looked like a wet rat.

"I guess I'll stay with the group," she said apologetically.

"We'll be back soon," Dave told him.

Teddy looked at Summer with such hurt in his eyes that she had to look away.

"You better hurry up," Slick called after him as he tromped away down the trail. "Coach will be back any minute."

But at that moment, Coach was almost two miles away...

***

Wet to the bone, water dripping off his nose, Coach was trudging down a muddy trail through the woods. He had turned off the main road five minutes ago, hoping the trail would lead to a cabin or house. But no house, no cabin, no nothing.

That fool Bateman had really done it this time, Coach growled to himself. That boy was such a booby. He shouldn't even let Buzzy carry the water bottles during time-outs. He certainly never should have let the fool have an important job like trip navigator. What was he thinking of? Buzzy was supposed to be such a bright boy, a genius in computers or something like that. Coach knew better. Any boy who couldn't play ball was a moron, plain and—

Coach turned the bend. The woods came to an abrupt halt. Ahead, a narrow strip of beach led down to a vast gray lake. Coach started plodding along the beach, his shoes sinking deep into the wet sand. There had to be some houses built around a lake like this. Had to be.

But as Coach walked along the beach, the narrow strip of sand kept narrowing. Several times, Coach stepped into the lake, once up to his knee. Cursing, growling, and hating Bateman more and more, he hiked on.

Life was like a football game. You could be on top one minute. Like he was this afternoon, with that come-from-behind victory. And then, one second later—bang! Fumble, penalty, car accident, whatever—and you found yourself stumbling around in the dark in the rain in the middle of nowhere.

Well, in life as in sports, you kept pushing till you heard the final whistle.

And sure enough, as he trudged on, the beach widened again. And up ahead, like a mirage in the moonlight, he saw a car parked on the beach.

A patrol car.

Coach almost laughed. He couldn't ask for better luck than that.

But as he came nearer, he saw that the patrol car was empty. And there were no keys in the ignition. So he couldn't use the cop's radio. He looked around. If the cop was parked on the beach, the cop himself couldn't be far. "HELLO!" Coach shouted. "HELLO! I'VE GOT AN EMERGENCY HERE."

He waited. The only answer was the steady thrum of rain splashing down on the lake.

He shouted again. Then he saw the tracks.

They were soggy with rain, but it looked like someone had skied up the hill into the woods. Or dragged something up there. Coach started up the hill, calling again. "HELLO!"

It was like the rain was washing his voice away; he couldn't raise any volume.

Coach started into the woods, trading the light of the moonlit beach for almost total darkness among the tall, wet trees.

He didn't get far before he heard the rustle of leaves.

Something was moving.

He whirled.

Just as the dark figure hit him dead on.

Dying in the Rain

People had always compared the stout coach to a bowling ball, but right now he looked more like a pin. He fell back, tripped over a root, hit his head hard against a tree, and went down. His attacker kept coming, falling down on top of him.

Coach wriggled free before he realized it was a woman. A small woman. As he groped to his knees in the darkness, the woman lay on her back on the ground, talking to him. But in his confusion, he couldn't make out what she was saying. Then he realized why. Her mouth was tightly gagged with thick, white cloth. Her face was bone white. She was crying. Her hands were bound, too—and her legs. Here he thought he'd been attacked; she must have fallen on him!

He gasped. Because he had just seen the wide, dark circle on the front of the woman's suede jacket. Blood. He reached behind her head, fumbling with the tight knot. He couldn't loosen it. Her eyes were on his. She was an attractive woman, in her mid-thirties Coach would have guessed, with short, blond hair, cropped close up by her ears, pageboy style.

But those eyes. He couldn't pull his gaze away. They were so soft, so frightened. And as he watched, it was as if the life went right out of them. The eyes stayed open, but they went from staring to not staring. The woman shuddered once. Then she was still.

Coach was no doctor, but he knew it right then. She had died. Died in his arms.

He lowered her head gently back down onto the hard forest floor. Then he stood up. It was like she was still looking at him. He backed away, and he was glad when he broke her line of vision and got away from those big, unseeing eyes.

Then the realization hit.

Someone had done this to her.

Whoever it was... he—or they—were still on the loose.

And Slick and Dave—his two best athletes, his best boys—were waiting for him back at the van.

Like sitting ducks.

Coach started to run.

***

"All right!" said Slick, rubbing his hands together.

"Home sweet home," said Summer.

"They look empty," Missy said. "That's just what I was afraid of. They

look dark and empty and scary."

The horseshoe of cabins that ringed the clearing all had numbers nailed to the outside. Some of the cabins had screen doors. Others just had dark, gaping doorways. The ramshackle cabins all looked dead.

"Some camp," Summer said.

"Well, at least we can get out of the rain," Missy said brightly. She started marching gaily toward the nearest cabin, skipping up the steps. She headed straight in. And as if Missy were the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the other teenagers all followed her inside.

"Cozy," Summer said.

"Oh, Summer," Missy said. "Always complaining."

"Yeah, Summer," Slick said. "I spent a lot of dough on the rental on this place. Show me a little respect."

The cabin was dank and dark. There was a metal bunk bed in the corner, bare metal, bare springs, like something from a prison.

Still, it was good to get out of the rain, Summer had to admit.

They were all just standing around, looking at each other. Summer saw the looks passing between Slick and Dave, saw the looks they were giving her and Belinda and Missy. She looked at her friends, and saw why. Belinda was wearing a Carville High orange-and-black T-shirt and it was plastered to her skin so tightly you could see the straps of her bra. Belinda must have felt them staring, because she crossed her arms over her chest. She looked very uncomfortable.

"Now what do we do?" Missy asked.

The question hung in the air, and Summer saw another look pass from Dave to Slick. She knew what they wanted to do.

"I guess we should hang out here for a while," Russ said. "Until the rain lets up."

Slick was smiling slyly.

"What?" Belinda demanded angrily. "*What?*"

"Nothing," he said, putting on a face of mock innocence. "Just that it looks like we're kind of having ourselves a wet T-shirt contest, now aren't we?"

"Shut up," Belinda snapped. "Russ!"

"C'mon, Slick," Russ told him. "Lay off."

Slick sat down on the bottom bunk, bouncing up and down on the springs and making monkey sounds.

Belinda started for the cabin door, but Russ stepped in her way. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to another cabin," she said stiffly, not looking at him.

"Another cabin? What for?"

"To change."

Slick guffawed. "What are you going to change into? Sticks and leaves?"

Belinda spun hard, glaring at him. "I brought my backpack, remember? You made fun of me, but see, you were wrong. It's good to bring a change of clothes. C'mon," she told Summer and Missy. Then she stormed out.

Slick just laughed harder.

"Slick," Summer said, "grow up. Really."

Slick immediately stopped laughing and gave her his serious blank look. She shook her head, annoyed.

"C'mon," Missy said, tugging on her arm. "Belinda's right. We should change out of these wet things."

"Into what? Our cheerleading uniforms?"

Missy shrugged. "Why not?"

It seemed stupid, but Summer let Missy tug her out the door.

"Don't be long," Slick called after her.

And then she was back outside in the dark and the rain.

***

Teddy Bateman kicked the van's rear tire, which had gone flat. They were partying, he was sure of it. They were always shutting him out.

Partying with those three beautiful girls. With every cell of his being, Teddy longed to have a girlfriend. He could hold her hand, he could kiss her, he could...

Who was he fooling? The only time girls ever gave him the time of day was during halftime at a game, when he was wearing his Buzzy head.

Teddy gave up kicking the van's flat tire. He tried pacing instead.

In their short orange-and-black skirts and tight orange-and-black shirts, the cheerleaders drove Teddy half-crazy with excitement. He sometimes worried that he was going to faint during the halftime show.

But even during the game, the joke was that the cheerleaders didn't want anything to do with Buzzy the Bee. They would pull on his stinger, or slap his head, or push him down. The only girl who was ever nice to him—on the field and off—was Summer.

Summer. Every time Teddy looked into those wise eyes of hers, he felt his heart melt. What he wanted to do was throw himself at the girl's feet and say, "Take me, I'm yours."

Great thinking, Teddy, he told himself. That was really the way to Summer's heart.

What she saw in Slick was totally beyond him.

Besides the fact that he was so cool and sexy and handsome and such a star athlete, what did Slick have going for him?

Teddy shouted in frustration. If he had wanted to impress Summer, he had sure picked a brilliant way to go about it. He had gotten the team lost. Everyone hated him now. But Coach hated him most of all.

Just then, Teddy had an idea. Maybe there was a way he could make this up to Coach. He opened the van's front door and took the keys out of the ignition. Then he walked around and unlocked the van's way back. He pulled up the carpet, found the inset metal ring in the metal floor, and lifted the large metal cover. He reached into the van's trunk and pulled out the jack, the tire iron, and the spare.

Most kids probably wouldn't have guessed he'd know how to change a tire, not in a million years. But he did.

Of course, the only reason he knew was because his nervous, neurotic accountant of a father was always teaching him safety precautions. The very day he had gotten his learner's permit, Mr. Bateman had spent hours making him practice changing a tire. "Just in case—you never know—you get stranded somewhere," his father had explained with a weak, nervous smile.

Well, now they were stranded all right. And maybe if Teddy changed the tire before Coach came back, he wouldn't be quite so angry.

Teddy positioned the jack under the rear fender. The car was already at an angle, which made the whole operation a little dicey. But the tree was holding the van securely, he was sure of it. He started to pump up the back of the van.

He had only pumped twice when the van's engine roared to life.

Teddy was so scared, he dropped the lever and shouted, "Oh, Mommy!" He jumped backward.

How the...?

Engines didn't just turn on by themselves.

Then he realized what had happened. Someone had slipped into the van and started the car. Teddy picked up the tire iron. He was red with shame. Some kids at school had once put a plastic rat in his homeroom desk, so that when he reached for his papers, he had screamed for his mother, just like he had now. And his mother had died of lung cancer when he was only nine.

Teddy wanted to brain whoever had played this new trick on him; he wanted to kill them for embarrassing him. But when he stalked around to the front of the van, there was no one sitting behind the wheel.

Teddy stood very still, listening, trying to hear over the thrum of the car motor. He was sure that whoever was playing the joke on him—Slick, most likely—was creeping off through the dark. Teddy was about to go after him when the van's windshield wipers started wiping frantically back and forth.

Teddy backed away from the van, the tire iron starting to shake in his wet hands.

Because from where he was standing, he could see that there was no one sitting behind the wheel of the van. And *that* meant...

The van's headlights turned on, throwing two big, white spotlights

on the battered trunk of the old oak. Teddy backed away, horror-struck. The van backed up as well. Its engine revved once, twice. For one crazy second, Teddy thought the van was going to come after him. He was set to run. But the van drove straight back down the incline, ramming the tree all over again.

Then the van backed up again.

Over and over, the big, white van charged, and with each attack it splintered off more bark and wood from the old oak tree's wide trunk.

Glass from the van's windshield was shattering with every attack. The left headlight went out. Then the bumper came off. But the van kept coming. Until finally, the car sheered off from the tree, flew down the ravine, and smashed itself against another oak twenty yards down the hill. The one working headlight glowed out. The wipers slowly stopped. The engine shut down with a groan and a sigh.

Teddy watched the van for a long while, not trusting that it would stay dead. Then he smelled smoke.

It was a harsh, mustard smell that burned its way into his nose. He turned back toward the tree. Yellowish smoke was snaking out of a gash in the bark.

And—strange!—Teddy felt himself drawn forward, drawn toward the burning wood.

When he came closer, the smoke stopped. Teddy reached out a finger and cautiously traced the tree's wound. There was moss around the edges of the cut.

Scared but unable to stop himself, Teddy rolled up his left shirtsleeve. Then he reached his hand into the narrow gash in the wood.

He hated to think what might be living in that hole—Spiders? Snakes?—but he kept inching his fingers in farther. Farther. What was wrong with him? He wasn't himself, he thought, as he sunk his entire forearm into the tree.

And then an awful thought occurred to him.

The tree was going to clamp down on his arm and bite it off. He was sure of it.

He giggled hysterically.

Because he now realized what had made the van start itself like it had.

He had lost his mind, that's what had happened. Too many years of lonely adolescence without a girlfriend had driven him bonkers. He was seeing things. He was dreaming while awake.

Which meant it was perfectly safe for him to stick his hand the rest of the way into the tree.

He pushed his fingertips forward, wiggling them. The slash in the wood got even narrower as it went back. He had to press hard.

And then suddenly, Teddy's hand slipped forward, so that his arm disappeared up to his shoulder and his face smacked into the tree's rough bark, dislodging his glasses.

At the same second his fingers closed around something hard and smooth.

And the second after that—

Something inside the tree sank its teeth deep into the palm of his hand.

Teddy Grows Up

With a shout, Teddy yanked his hand out of the tree.

There was something attached to his hand! Something white and round like a giant crab. Whatever it was, it was biting him! The pain thrilled up his arm and screamed throughout his entire body.

Teddy waved his hand wildly. But then the pain stopped, and he looked at the object more closely. He was holding a mask. A white hockey mask pitted with dark black holes. The mask wasn't biting him. How could it? It was just a piece of plastic. It must have been his imagination, must have been the bark of the tree scratching his hand.

And then Teddy's legs went wobbly. He began to stagger from tree to tree, trying to hold himself upright by grabbing onto vines, tree trunks, saplings, plants. So strange! In his head, it was as if he were hearing and feeling hundreds of tiny creatures flapping their furry wings. In his mind's eye, he saw a hundred bats pouring out of the dark mouth of their cave home.

Then he gasped in pain. And when he looked down, he saw to his horror that a large, round bulge was inching slowly up his wrist, up his skinny arm. It was as if the mask had put something into his bloodstream. Whatever it was, it was snaking its way up, up, up toward his heart. And there was a voice in his head now—a boy's voice, but not his own—and the voice was telling him that his only hope was to put the mask on.

Put the mask on *now*.

Feeling faint, Teddy slipped the mask onto his head.

Instantly, he started screaming in pain. He staggered down the ravine, fell, rolling in the wet leaves, tumbling all the way down to the van. He grabbed the van's door handle, pulled himself up, but then the pain started again. He crashed back into the van, shouting in agony. He arched his back. His arms raised themselves in the air like paws, then slapped onto the mask from both sides.

But he couldn't get the mask off. And then he realized that he didn't want to take the mask off.

Teddy groaned with pleasure. Suddenly, he was feeling stronger every second. He looked down in amazement at his skinny arms as the biceps popped out, first the left, then the right, like that moment when a balloon first begins to inflate. There was a loud scrape of skin against metal as his body spurted up several inches in height. He yelled in agony as his bones stretched.

Teddy flexed his hands.

They were hairy now.

They felt strong enough to rip the heads off the biggest jocks in the world.

Peep Show

"Which cabin are they in?"

"That one."

"Are you sure?"

"Or maybe... that one."

"Moron!"

"Shut up!"

"*You* shut up!"

Russ had stretched out his large bulk on the uncomfortable metal springs of the bottom bunk. He watched his two teammates whispering like five-year-olds at the open window of their cabin as they peered out into the darkness. Slick and Dave weren't the most mature guys on the planet to begin with. Now that the two of them had smoked that joint, they were really acting goofy.

"You guys are pathetic, you know that?" he asked in a low voice.

Slick didn't even turn from the window to look at him. "I'm going to go sneak a peek," he told Dave.

Dave grinned. "Excellent idea, commander! I'm coming with you." They high-fived and, laughing hysterically, headed for the cabin door.

"What about you, Russ? You in?" Slick asked him.

"C'mon, Russ. Free peep show," Dave said.

"Nah," Russ said. "I'll pass."

Slick shook his head, disapproving. "Poor Russ. He's so afraid of Belinda he can't even think straight."

"That's not why," Russ said. But the truth was, that was a large part of the reason. "I don't think it's very"—he hated the word he was about to use but couldn't think of a better one—"nice to spy on girls like that."

Slick pounced on the word like a loose football. "*Nice?* What kind of a Boy Scout are you, Johnson?"

"C'mon," Dave said. "Forget about him. We better hurry or we're going to miss all the action."

Slick was still in the doorway, and Russ could tell he was going to take one more potshot before he left. "It's just so sad," he told Dave. "The way poor Russ is so afraid of his little missus."

"I know," Dave agreed. "He's been hanging around with her for almost a year, and he's still not getting any."

Slick chortled. "You better come with us, Russ, it's the only way you'll ever get to see Belinda naked."

Russ could feel his anger beginning to rumble deep inside him. But he stayed right where he was as they disappeared into the darkness.

When they were gone, he got up off the bed. The rain had slowed. In

the distance, he could hear the giggling of the girls floating through the cool night air. He wanted to go warn them.

Good move, Russ, he told himself. He was already the only black kid on the football team, and ostracized every way to Sunday. All he had to do was rat on the captain and star receiver. Then he'd really be Mr. Popular.

On the other hand...

He hated to think of the guys spying on Belinda. For one thing, Belinda was so into control. It would kill her if she found out they had peeped.

But Russ was having another reaction that surprised him. Slick had gone out with Summer, and presumably what he was going to see in that cabin would be no surprise to him. Even so, it burned Russ bad to think of Slick and Dave peeking in at Summer Stone.

Russ shook his head. Watch it, home boy, he told himself. Watch it.

***

Summer unzipped her orange parka and hung it over the rusty screen door of cabin #9. She ran her hands back through her dark hair, squeezing and wringing out the water.

Missy unzipped her black jumpsuit, stepped out of it, and pulled off her striped T-shirt. Giggling, she started doing a majorette number as she removed her underwear, flinging the wet bra and panties to either side of the dark cabin with two loud splats.

Summer laughed and applauded. Stark naked, Missy chanted, "Sting 'em, Hornets!" and danced around the cabin as she did the cheer.

Belinda was in the corner, facing the wall as she peeled off her wet clothes. That was Belinda all over. In the gym, she always stood close to her locker when she changed. She had once told Summer the reason. It wasn't just modesty. She couldn't get over her fear that some guy might be spying on her.

"Belinda," Summer now told her, wriggling out of her sopping wet jeans. "You can relax, we're in the dark in the middle of nowhere. No one can see us."

"No one except the birdies," Missy chirped.

Belinda didn't turn around. "Well, I don't want the birdies seeing me either," she said, and they all laughed.

Missy did a cartwheel and ended up bumping right into Belinda. "Watch it!" Belinda warned her.

"Sorry," Missy said. Then she looked down at her perfect, skinny body and critically pinched the flesh above her left hip, trying to raise some flab where none existed. "Listen, guys," she said, "can I ask you a very serious question? Do you think I'm putting on any weight?"

Missy lived in terror of putting on an extra ounce. She figured her

body was her only asset in life, and the only thing that kept Dave close. She was probably right, thought Summer.

"You're losing weight," Belinda told her. "In the brain."

Missy laughed, then got the joke and frowned. "That's not nice," she said. Missy always hated jokes about her intelligence—when she got them. She pulled open her knit bag and pulled out her cheerleading clothes.

Summer had removed the last of her clothing. She moved to the window, looking out into the darkness, breathing deep drafts of the country air. She didn't feel in any hurry to put on her sweaty cheerleading uniform. She felt so clean.

Then, somewhere out there in the darkness, she heard a twig snap. She ducked back away from the window.

"What is it?" Belinda hissed, covering herself with both hands.

They all listened.

"Nothing," Summer said, shaking her head. "I'm getting paranoid is all." She picked up her orange-and-black cotton cheerleading shirt and slipped it on. She peered around at her friends as they suited up as well. She laughed.

"What?" Belinda asked.

"I don't know. Feels kind of funny for us to be putting on our cheerleading outfits out here in the middle of the woods, doesn't it? Like we're gearing up for a big game..."

***

Huffing and puffing, Coach Wardell jogged down the muddy road. His heart was pounding, threatening to burst. But he told himself he had to keep going. He had to make it to the end zone without getting tackled or the game was lost.

In this case, the end zone was the van.

Coach was running so hard he went right by the spot where the van had gone off the road. Then he saw the tire tracks. He hurtled down the culvert; he almost tripped.

The van was parked farther down than he remembered. Maybe Slick or Dave had gotten the van started. "Guys!" he yelled hoarsely. There was no response. "Slick! Dave!"

He reached the van. It was empty. The terror that had gripped him so firmly from the moment he saw the dying woman now squeezed even tighter. The kids were gone!

He leaned against the van for a moment, almost choking he was so out of breath. Then he started jogging aimlessly from tree to tree, calling the kids' names when he could get the breath out.

Then he heard it. The telltale rustle of leaves, the thump of footsteps. Someone was coming.

He turned.

Grunting, a figure came out of the woods.

Whoever it was, he was running right at him.

Coach Wardell shrunk back.

The man was wearing an evil-looking white mask pitted with dark holes.

Spin the Bottle

The man in the mask fell to his knees in front of Coach. He was grunting loudly but his words were garbled. The man lifted his two hands together, as if begging for Coach's help. The hands, Coach saw, were tightly bound. Just like... the dying woman's.

There were more footsteps crunching over twigs and brush. Both men turned as the trooper stepped out of the woods.

Coach felt a surge of relief. Help had arrived! He stepped forward, arms outstretched in greeting just as—

BANG!

The trooper fired his gun. Coach staggered back. It felt like he'd just been nailed by a three-hundred-pound nose tackle. He fell back against the van, rolled, slid down with his head by the front tire. There was a bullet hole smack in the center of Coach's chest. His eyes and mouth were open wide, like a mask.

The man in the hockey mask scrambled to his feet and was running again as the trooper took aim...

***

It was hard to tell whether it was still raining. The cool night breeze kept whipping fat drops of water off the overhanging trees. Summer led the way as they tromped back into the cabin.

Slick and Dave were sitting on an upper bunk. They both had strange looks on their faces. Blank. But right away Summer knew they were up to something.

"We're back," Missy sang. She made a beeline for Dave, and since she couldn't reach his face, shook a wet sneaker. "Did you miss me?" she asked.

Dave and Slick looked at each other, as if they were exchanging a private joke. "Oh, yeah," Dave said. He was smiling. "I really missed you."

"You didn't miss much," Slick said, and they guffawed.

"What's going on?" Belinda asked, angry. She poked Russ. He was sitting up on the lower bunk, looking a little sick. He didn't meet Belinda's gaze, or Summer's, for that matter.

"Nothing," he muttered. He got to his feet wearily, gave them all a sick smile. "C'mon," he said. "We better get back to the van."

"Why?" Slick asked. He hopped down from the upper bunk. "Buzzy will come get us when Coach gets back. Let's hang."

"Slick's right," Dave said. "It'll probably be hours before Coach gets

to a gas station and they can fix the van."

"Hours?!" Belinda jammed a fist into her hip; her eyes flashed. "But we've got the victory party tonight."

"Yeah, well, I don't think we're going to make it," Dave said.

"Yup. Looks like we're going to have to party out here," Slick said.

Summer felt it again, that tension in the air. Slick was looking at her. She lowered her gaze.

"Party! Party!" Missy cried.

"Missy," Belinda said. "We're not having any party. What do we have to party with?"

Missy looked crushed. Then she brightened. "I know! We can play party games." She looked around the room, squinting into the dark corners in search of inspiration. She spotted an empty Coke bottle, the old-fashioned glass kind with the thin, tapering spout, and pounced on it. "Aha!"

Everyone looked at her dumbly for a moment. Missy just grinned. "Spin the bottle!" she explained.

The tension that Summer had felt in the small, dark cabin instantly doubled.

"No way," Belinda said.

"Way," corrected Slick. He draped an arm around Missy's shoulder. "That's a great idea, Missy."

Missy raised her chin with pride.

"You see, Missy, you're not so stupid after all," Slick went on. Missy kept smiling, but Summer could tell she wasn't so sure she liked *that* compliment.

Slick took the bottle from Missy, stuck his finger in the spout, and twirled it. "Form a circle, everybody," he said in his lowest, sexiest voice.

"I said no," Belinda said.

Summer could see the panic on her face. For a control freak, things were sure getting out of control.

"Oh, Belinda!" said Missy, slapping her on the back. "Don't be a party pooper!"

"Yeah, Belinda," Dave said. He cuffed her shoulder. "It'll be fun."

Still twirling the bottle, Slick sat down on the cabin floor. Dave sat across from him. Missy immediately plopped down right next to Dave. She reached up and tugged at Belinda's hand.

Summer wasn't feeling too keen on the game herself. There were two basic possibilities, and they both terrified her. One, Slick would have to kiss somebody besides her. Two, Slick would have to kiss *her*.

"Russ," Dave barked, "down on the floor. I'm speaking as your captain now."

Russ looked at Belinda, as if for approval.

"Don't look at her," Dave said. "You're playing this game with us or you're off the team."

Summer saw the look of pleading Russ was giving Belinda. "C'mon, Belinda," Summer said. "Let's get it over with."

As soon as they had all sat, Missy yelled, "I spin first! Because I thought of the game."

She took the bottle from Slick and it made a little pop as it came off his finger. She knelt in the center of the circle and spun the bottle hard on the rough old floorboards.

The bottle spun and spun. Finally, it began to slow down, its spout pointing first at Dave, then Russ, then Slick, then Dave, then Russ...

Please don't stop on Slick, Summer prayed. Please don't stop on Slick.

So of course, the bottle stopped on Slick, or at least it was pointing a lot closer to Slick than to Dave. But Missy immediately squealed, "Goody! I get to kiss Dave!" She traced a crooked line across the floorboards from the spout of the bottle to her boyfriend.

"It was pointing at Slick," Dave said, with a half-smile, trying to ward her off. But she grabbed his head and held it and planted a loud, long kiss right on the lips.

"Okay," he said, trying to pull away, "that's enough."

But she wasn't through. She kept kissing him until Slick finally called "Gong!"

"I love this game," Missy said happily. Dave didn't look so pleased.

Dave spun next. The bottle pointed right at Missy. Now Dave looked really annoyed. He gave Missy a friendly peck. Missy gave her next turn to Belinda, who spun the bottle hard.

There was no doubt this time. It pointed straight at Slick.

Belinda laughed. "All *right*," she said, sounding very pleased.

More than once, Belinda had told Summer that Slick was the hottest white guy she'd ever seen. "Sorry, Summer," Belinda now said, "but he's going to get it."

She marched purposefully over to Slick, who smiled as she approached. She pretended to fix her clothes and hair. Then she started to kiss him. On the lips. The kiss went on. And on. There were cheers and catcalls from Dave and Missy. Russ and Summer were both silent.

Finally, Belinda lifted her head and grinned at the rest of the group. "Sorry about that, Summer, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity."

"Don't apologize to me," Summer said. "He's all yours."

That's what she said, but what she was feeling was nausea. And then Dave asked Slick how the kiss was. Slick smacked his lips and sighed loudly. "Delicious," he said.

"My turn," Summer said quietly. She grabbed the bottle and spun it.

It landed on Russ.

Good, she thought. She hated the idea of kissing Dave but she would have done it right then just to get at Slick. But kissing Russ... that was something she'd kind of wanted to do anyway.

She smiled at Russ, who looked extremely nervous.

"Don't even think about it," Belinda warned him.

"Why?" Missy asked. "Belinda, that's not fair. You kissed Slick."

"Kiss her! Kiss her!" chanted Slick and Dave. That burned Summer, but she knew Slick was faking.

"I'm telling you, Russ Johnson, you kiss her and you're dead meat," Belinda went on. "You kiss her and you can kiss our relationship goodbye. You got it?"

Russ turned and stared at her levelly. "Belinda," he said. "Why are you always ordering me around?"

There was a loud "Ooooh!" from Slick and Dave.

Summer hesitated. As much as she wanted to get Slick back, she didn't want to get Russ in trouble.

Russ nodded to her. She raised her eyebrows, as if to ask, "Are you sure?" He nodded again.

"Russ!" cried Belinda.

Summer moved forward. Her eyes were locked on Russ's now. She knelt in front of him. Smiled. He smiled back. It was strange. It felt awfully natural, somehow, being this close to Russ.

And then he gently hooked his large hand behind her head and lowered his large head toward hers. Their lips met.

"You're going to die," she heard Belinda say.

But it was as if there were no one in the room. As if Russ and she were all alone sharing the most private moment. The kiss was long and tender. Her hands went around the back of Russ's neck and roamed around his broad, powerful back. His big hands were on her back too. Not moving, but firmly planted, holding her in place.

Finally, he pulled his head back. She had never seen his eyes look so serious.

"You'll pay!" Belinda said, and she stormed out of the cabin.

Jason

For a moment, no one spoke. Summer was looking down at her shoelaces, which were soggy and untied. She couldn't look at Russ, she couldn't look at Slick—she didn't feel like she could look at anybody.

Russ crossed to the doorway. "Belinda!" he yelled.

He waited a second, then called again. Still no response. Cursing, Russ moved out into the night.

Slick, who was sitting cross-legged, stood up without using his hands. Summer lifted her gaze. He was staring straight at her. He walked toward her, hands in the back pockets of his jeans. He stood over her, looking down. "Have fun?" he asked.

"Lots," she said.

"Great game, huh?"

"If you know how to play."

Missy had her arms around Dave's neck, as usual. "What do you mean, Summer? The rules are pretty easy."

"Uh-huh," Summer said. "But some people can't play by the rules, even when they're easy ones."

Dave was staring past Missy at Slick, signaling him by lowering his eyebrows, hard.

"What?" Slick asked, as if he didn't know what Dave meant. Then he pretended to get it. "Oh, you and Missy want to be alone, huh?" Dave's eyes widened, and he started to shake his head in protest, but Missy squealed with delight.

"You do?" cried Missy. "Oh, Dave, that is soooo sweet. Summer, did you hear that?"

"I heard," Summer said.

She also *felt*. Slick had a hold of her hand now, pulling her to her feet. It felt so good. Hand, you're a traitor, she silently yelled at herself. "C'mon," Slick said, guiding her to the open door. "Let's give them some space."

Dave followed them out of the cabin, hissing at Slick to stick around. But Slick kept pulling Summer forward, into the wet and dripping darkness.

As they walked away from the cabin, Summer heard Dave and Missy's voices, receding. "Do you love me?" Missy asked Dave.

"I told you, you can only ask me that twice a day."

***

The man in the mask was running hard through the woods. *BANG!* A

shot rang out. The bullet winged his leg. He tottered against a birch tree, almost fell. He righted himself and kept running, though now he was limping badly and there was a blood-red rip in his chino pants and then—

BANG! The second shot ripped though the darkness. This bullet caught Cliff in the back. He straightened, then fell forward, and since his hands were tied, there was nothing he could do to break his fall. His head smacked down against the stump of a tree, as if he were trying to chop wood with his face.

The trooper stood over him. With one wet boot, he pushed Cliff's head off the tree stump. The dying man rolled slightly, twisting in a way a living body never would. Cliff was dead.

The trooper cursed. Even dead, Cliff made trouble for him. Because now he would have to lug Cliff's guts all the way back to the lake. Otherwise, he couldn't pin all this mess on Jason. Disgusted, he fired a third shot into the base of Cliff's skull. And a fourth. The gun clicked out of bullets.

Which meant the trooper had no bullets left to protect himself against the boy who had just come up behind him.

The trooper whirled, firing instinctively.

Click. Click.

Standing before him was a tall, muscular teenager who wore *another* white hockey mask! For a second, the trooper's heart stood still. Because for that one instant, all sanity left his brain. For one instant, the trooper's mind was telling him that the impossible was true. That the horror stories he had heard since he was a kid growing up near Crystal Lake were all true. Jason Voorhees really did return from the dead.

Then, a second later, the trooper realized the truth. This was just some crazy nut. Every few years, some backwoods idiot got so caught up in the Jason legend that he acted out the part.

The muscular kid with the white mask and the big biceps raised his left arm high, as if in salute. He was holding something that looked like a tire iron.

"Son," said the trooper, "you better—"

And then the arm came down.

Teddy looked down at the trooper's dead body, which was nestled among the wet, dark leaves. Blood was bubbling out from the trooper's caved-in skull, dark-red blood mixed with clots of gray-white brains.

The trooper had killed Coach. Teddy saw him do it. It made Teddy's brain hiss with anger. Coach was *his*.

He walked over to the other dead body. The one wearing the white mask. Dime-store stuff. Halloween crap. It was as if this guy was *mocking* him. Mocking the real thing. Teddy kicked the mask off the corpse with his hightop purple sneaker. Then he knelt down and went through the man's pockets.

He found one useful item. An x-acto knife. Teddy laughed. The murdered man had been carrying a weapon the whole time, but with his hands tied, the knife had been useless. Teddy pocketed the small, gray razor.

There was blood everywhere, Teddy realized. Not just on the trees and wet leaves. More blood and brains and guts were spattered over his own clothes than you saw on a butcher's apron. He giggled wildly. Heeee—he sure had changed. In the old days, before he put on the mask, he would have been very upset to mess up his school clothes. Now...

He heard a loud fluttering overhead. He looked up.

Through the darkness, he saw a black cloud descending. *Bats!* Within seconds, the furry creatures were crawling all over the two dead bodies.

Let them feast, Teddy thought as he headed off into the woods.

Okay, yes—the trooper had bagged Coach.

But that still left six more to go.

***

Slick was silent for much of the walk. So was Summer. This is dangerous, she thought, this not-talking business. It was like Slick was moving in for the kill, and talking was one of the only ways to ward him off.

She knew she should start jabbering away, but she couldn't do it. There had been so many times like this in the past, when they were on the same wavelength. They didn't have to say a word, they were communicating.

She smelled the water before she saw it. The trail widened. The shock—the way the woods just opened up, giving way to that vast,

glassy surface—took her breath away. The full moon was reflected in the rippling water. They'd already been quiet, but now Summer and Slick both stood staring, silenced by the beauty.

There was a dock leading out into the water. Oh no, Summer thought. Her defenses were low enough as it was, she didn't think she could handle a romantic setting.

The dock beckoned to them, like a gangplank. It had to be walked.

"Let's sit," Slick said when they'd reached the end of the dock. And before Summer could object, he sat.

She felt foolish standing while he was already sitting, so she sat down as well. She sat down as far from him as she could, but the dock wasn't that wide.

"Pretty," Slick said at last.

"Yeah."

He grinned at her in the darkness. She grinned back.

"Seems like old times," he said.

She took a deep breath. She was planning on saying something about how those times were gone for good, but the words wouldn't come.

"You're still mad at me, aren't you?" he asked.

She nodded. "You really hurt me, you know."

"I know," he said.

"And it wasn't the first time," she reminded him.

He nodded gravely. "I know that, too. But can I tell you something? You want to know why I cheated on you? The truth?"

Summer nodded. She could feel her chin trembling slightly.

Slick looked out over the dark water. "It was just... This is going to sound pretty stupid."

"Try me."

"It was just a total impulse kind of thing. Sometimes, it's just like my body takes over."

"Yeah, well—"

"Wait a second. I know that sounds awful, but what I want you to know is, it didn't *mean* anything. I can't stop thinking about you, Summer."

That last statement took Summer completely off guard. Even if it was a line, it pleased her so much that she couldn't speak.

"No one knows me the way you do," he went on. "It's like, I never feel like myself the way I do around you."

"Oh, is that so?" She hoped that remark would sound cutting and cynical, but her voice came out so soft that it sounded totally genuine.

He stretched out along the dock. She looked up at the stars, as if they might offer some route of escape. He was close by. He reached up and started rubbing her back.

"Don't," she said. But he didn't stop. So she lay down on her side.

Down underneath the dock the water gurgled as it slapped against the pilings.

Or maybe it was a killer lurking down there, thought Summer, remembering what Slick had told them about Crystal Lake.

On the other hand, there was a more immediate threat lying right beside her. Slick edged over another inch. He was like a fox slinking through the grass. Slowly he moved toward her.

So this was it—he was making his move. Her mind noted this like it was all happening to someone else and she was just a reporter…

And then his lips met hers and he rolled her over so that her back was on the hard wood of the dock and he was on top of her. They began making out with kisses so hungry they were like two vampires feeding on each other when—

Suddenly, a knife jabbed up from under the dock, slipping through the slats of the old, weather-beaten wood.

Summer screamed.

The knife went back and forth and back and forth, slicing through Summer's back and cutting her to ribbons.

Knitting Needles

"What are you thinking about?" Slick asked.

"Huh?" Summer started. She was still sitting on the dock. He was still rubbing her back.

She closed her eyes, trying to wipe out the horrid fantasy. She had only wanted to imagine him kissing her and the next thing she knew...

Why was she having such gruesome thoughts? Maybe it was because she was so afraid she was going to get back together with Slick.

"Summer..." She opened her eyes again. Slick nodded at her. "You've got this really scared look on your face," he said.

"Do I?"

Fear is a signal, she thought. My brain is trying to tell me something. Abruptly, she stood up, breaking the romantic mood altogether. "Let's go back," she said. "Everyone must be wondering where we went."

Slick put two hands behind his head and smiled up at her seductively. "They'd yell for us if Coach came back."

"Yeah, but let's go back anyway."

He thought for a moment. "Okay," he said. He held out a hand for her to pull him up. But she knew that trick, knew that if she grabbed his hand he wouldn't get pulled up, she'd get pulled down. She didn't trust herself to go through one more test. She turned and started clumping down the dock. "Come on," she said without looking back.

"You're cruel," he said, but she could hear him get up and start to follow her.

So close, so close, she was telling herself. Summer, Summer, Summer! Had she lost her mind? She couldn't get back together with Slick, absolutely, positively could not—not a third time. The third time would be death.

***

"Dave?"

Missy stumbled along the trail through the woods, tripping over a rock here and a root there. It was so dark. And the vines and branches kept slapping her face, almost as if they had a mind of their own and wanted to keep her from her boyfriend.

She knew she had asked Dave if he loved her too many times; she had broken their rule. But after Summer and Slick left them alone in the cabin, Dave had acted so moody. It made her panic in a big way. When she panicked, she needed reassurance. She must have asked him if he loved her about twenty times. Finally, Dave had yelled "No, I

don't!" and stormed out.

She had tried to follow him, but he must have really booked out of there, because no matter how fast she went, she couldn't seem to catch up. Or maybe she had taken the wrong trail?

Well, it was her own fault. Summer was always telling her she should use her head more and not just follow her impulses.

"Dave?!"

Missy stopped to listen, hoping she could hear his footsteps. She heard nothing, just the drip of water off leaves and the sighing of the trees in the breeze.

"DAVE!"

All at once, she felt the panic rise in her throat—she was alone—all alone—at night in the woods. Who knew what awful, scary beasts were roaming around the forest, ready to tear her to pieces.

She started to run, moving as fast as she could with so many trees in her way. And then, suddenly, the dark woods parted and she found herself facing a vast, moonlit field. Dotting the field were the charred remains of what looked like carnival rides. There had obviously been a terrible fire.

Her amazement and her curiosity briefly wiped Dave from her mind. Something jogged in her memory. Didn't Slick say something about a carnival? She'd been too scared by what he was saying to listen closely.

She started forward. In between her and the field was a large fence with barbed wire, but in many places the fence had been ripped apart and torn down. She stepped through.

Across the field from Missy rose a burnt skeleton of an old roller coaster. Nearby stood a carousel whose few remaining horses were black as coal. The carousel was revolving ever so slowly. And leaning against one of the horses...

At first Missy thought she was seeing a mirage in the darkness. But it was true. It was Buzzy, wearing his big, orange Buzzy the Bee head. He waved to her slowly as the carousel carried him gently into and out of her view.

"Buzzy!"

She ran to him, skipping.

"Hey, Buzzy!"

The burnt remains of the horses were sort of scary looking, with a wild and horrified look in their glass eyes. Missy stepped onto the slowly revolving carousel and walked to where Buzzy was standing.

"What are you doing out here?" she asked, giggling.

He didn't answer. He was carrying something, she saw. "What's that?" she asked. Though he was close enough now for her to see. He was holding a tire iron.

And before she had time to puzzle over why Buzzy would be carrying

a tire iron, he showed her why. He began twirling the tire iron like a baton, doing a foolish parody of some of her own cheerleading moves.

Missy laughed. Buzzy was such a clown. Sometimes he made her mad with all his clowning, but right now his sense of humor was greatly appreciated.

"You know, Buzzy," she said, moving closer, "you came along at just the right time." She put a hand to one side of her mouth, as if she were about to impart a huge secret. "Dave was just very bad to me."

The large, black eyes of the Buzzy Bee head stared at her blankly. The bee's long stinger was only inches from her face and pointing much more stiffly and straighter than usual.

"He left me," Missy said gaily, "left me sitting in one of those dreary old cabins. And when I ran after him, he ran too, and then I got lost...."

Missy, who had been so happy to see Buzzy, now suddenly found herself close to tears as she remembered Dave's cruelty. "But Dave really loves me, right?" she asked impulsively.

Buzzy nodded, his stinger bobbing up and down.

That made Missy feel better, knowing that Buzzy thought Dave loved her, but she still needed more reassurance. "You really think so?" she asked. Buzzy nodded again. "Say it," Missy begged. "Save Dave loves me. Say it!"

She put her hand on Buzzy's arm, squeezing, urging him to say the words. She pulled her hand back in shock. That arm felt so thick and strong! The hairs were bristly too, like steel wool.

And all at once, she realized that this wasn't Buzzy at all.

This was someone taller than Buzzy, with a broader chest.

Someone else had put on Buzzy's mask, to fool her. But who?

She was so confused that she said, "Dave?"

And then she took a sudden step backward, though she wasn't really sure why.

Buzzy's hand shot out and grabbed her, holding her in a grip of steel. Her mouth dropped open. Belatedly it occurred to Missy that it might be a good idea to run. But by then that powerful hand was dragging her down, right onto the floor of the spinning carousel. She tried to squirm away, but he was on top of her now, holding her in place. She screamed. The huge bee head just stared down at her, as if puzzled why she would be making so much noise. The bee's stinger was pointing at her throat. For the first time, Missy saw the black needles that protruded from the tip of the stinger.

There was something familiar about those sharp, black points.

Maybe if Missy had had an instant longer, she could have figured out why, could have recognized her own knitting needles.

But just then, the bee lowered its head in a sudden thrust.

The stinger's sharp points went through her throat.

Fear

Teddy bobbed his head up and down, watching with fascination as the stinger on his Buzzy mask threaded in and out of Missy's guts.

He couldn't get over his amazement. She was the captain of the cheerleading team and he had killed her. That was even more impressive than dating her.

For years, Teddy had dreamed of showing up at school with one of these cheerleaders on his arm. Wouldn't it be great to waltz into the cafeteria with Missy, Summer, or Belinda? "Buzzee, Buzzee, Buzzee," the chant would spring up. But. then the mouths of every single student would. drop open in unison as he led the beautiful girl into the room.

Teddy sighed. Well, he would never fulfill that fantasy now. At least not with Missy. In his mind, the fantasy changed. This time he was walking into the cafeteria with Missy's corpse. Actually, that seemed just as good a way to shut up the rest of the students.

He got up off what was left of Missy Lowe's body and removed the blood-stained bee head, revealing his white hockey mask underneath. It stuck to his face so tightly it was as if it were trying to embed itself deep into his skin.

He heard the soft fluttering of bat wings. The bats smelled blood, he realized. Good, they would clean up the mess. He looked across the field. Past the burned-out wreckage of the various amusement rides, he could see the forest where he knew the old Crystal Lake campgrounds lay.

Missy had been a dream date come true. Five more dates were waiting.

***

Russ had tromped around the campgrounds twice already, or so it seemed. There were so many trails, so many hidden cabins, he wasn't sure where he was anymore. At one point he had come across a large, boarded-up building that appeared to be the old camp's main lodge. The building was latched shut, so he didn't bother looking inside for his girlfriend.

Then, when he had just about given up hope of finding Belinda, he saw her.

She was sitting on the dilapidated porch of a cabin, her head in her hands. Russ walked slowly toward her; she still didn't look up.

"Didn't you hear me calling you all this time?"

She raised her head and glared at him in silent fury.

Russ had been going out with Belinda most of the year and he still hadn't gotten over how beautiful she was. Even now, when he was mad at her and feeling fed up with her, he was still struck by the sight of her. Her skin was the color of mocha and she had this heart-shaped face with high cheekbones.

"Do you know how ridiculous you're being?" he asked.

She didn't answer that question, which didn't surprise him. It was pretty typical. She never let him in.

He sat down next to her. "Belinda," he said. "It wasn't my idea to play that game. And you went first. You kissed Slick pretty good, too."

"Shut up," she said without looking at him. Then she lifted her head and pointed her finger at him angrily. "You will not speak until I tell you."

Russ felt his eyebrows shoot up. Apparently, his expression got through to her because she started to laugh. He laughed too. "You are really getting out of hand, you know that?" he asked.

"*You* are," she retorted.

"I'm serious," he said. "I'm worried about you."

"Oh, now, don't start that worried stuff again," Belinda said.

"But I am," he told her gently. "I'm worried about you. You try to control everything. You try to control me, you try to control yourself. Our school does have such a thing as a guidance counselor, you know."

"Look," Belinda said, her eyes flashing, "I don't need a guidance counselor. It just made me jealous to see you kissing Summer like that. Now you can say it's crazy, but tell that to my heart, okay?"

"Belinda," he said, "there's more than just that kiss going down here. Look at the way you order me around. You're always telling me what to do, and even more often you're telling me what *not* to do. I mean, what are you afraid of?"

He waited for a response, got none. Unless you counted the sounds Russ heard in the forest.

Something was moving in the pitch-black woods that surrounded them on all sides. He and Belinda both picked up their heads, listening.

"Probably a deer," he explained to Belinda. Not hearing anything more, Russ went on, "I'm serious, Belinda. Tell me what you're afraid of."

Belinda bit her lip. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "I'm awful."

Russ's heart softened. When she talked like that, it made him love her again. "You're not awful."

"I am."

"You're just scared. Which brings me back to my question. Of what?"

"I'm not afraid of anything," she insisted.

"Yeah, you are," Russ said. "And that's okay. But if you could just say

what it is, then maybe you wouldn't have to act out."

He waited. She didn't say a word. He sighed. "Listen," he said, "I think I know what it is."

"Don't you say a word," she warned. "Not about that."

He ignored her instructions. "It's because of your daddy, isn't it?"

"Russ!" She had that finger of hers in his face, threatening him. But he went on anyway. "You think that because your daddy abandoned you and your mother that all men are going to leave you, don't you? That's what you're afraid of, now isn't it?"

Belinda made a fist as if to strike him, but then opened her hand and caressed his cheek. "Please stop," she said gently, and as if to make sure he didn't say another word, she leaned over and planted a soft kiss on his lips.

"What was that for?" he asked when she sat back.

She smiled. "That's for being good."

The way she talked, it was as if he were seven, not sixteen. But the kiss had gotten to him nevertheless. He couldn't resist. They were sitting so close out here in the dark, all alone. "How good?" he asked, picking up her baby tone. She always liked that, when he talked baby talk. "Good enough for another kiss?" he asked.

She glanced up at him, then nodded. He moved in slowly, putting an arm around her. It was crazy. She was so small compared to him. He could have lifted her in the air with one hand. And yet she held such power over him.

His lips found hers. It wasn't much of a kiss. She was keeping her mouth tightly closed. He pulled his head back. "I think I've been better than that," he said.

She laughed and then they started kissing again and this time she let him really kiss her. And the next thing he knew, he was lowering her down to the splintery, wet floor of the porch. His hands began to roam, and the excitement flooded through him in giant waves and—

Belinda pulled away sharply. "I didn't say you could do *that*," she said breathlessly.

Russ was breathing pretty heavily himself. When he caught his breath, he said, "Belinda, you're not my kindergarten teacher, you know that?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that's the way you treat me. 'You can do this.' 'If you're good, then you can do that.' I mean, it's ridiculous."

He sat up, frustrated and annoyed. Behind him in the cabin he heard the floorboards creak, but he was too preoccupied to care.

"Don't pout," she ordered.

He didn't answer. She was right, he was pouting. He couldn't help it, he was feeling a terrible, frustrated ache. In its own way, it hurt worse

than getting smacked on the football field by a giant blocker. He knew which pain he preferred, anyway.

"Look," Belinda told him, "it's your choice. You can do this my way or you won't do it at all."

Walk away, Russ told himself. Just get up and tell her to forget the whole thing and walk away. But instead, he couldn't resist asking, "Do what, exactly?"

Belinda smiled and licked her lips. "That depends on how good you are."

Russ was lying on his back. He stared up at the cobwebbed roof of the porch. The ache of frustration was beginning to ease, and with the lessening of the pain some of his powers of reasoning had returned. He stood. "I guess we're not doing anything then," he said.

Feeling strangely exhilarated, he stepped off the porch and headed for the woods.

He got about halfway down the worn dirt trail that led to the forest before Belinda called to him. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going back to the van," he told her, turning only briefly.

It's over, he told himself. The thought made him feel tremendously free. He would break up with her. He wouldn't have to play any of her silly games ever again.

Fact was, he could still feel Summer's kiss on his lips.

***

Belinda balled her hands into fists. She couldn't believe Russ was just walking away like that. She willed him to turn around. But his large, lumbering shape disappeared into the woods, merged with the shadows, and was gone.

She wanted to call out to him but she forced herself to hold the words in. She would keep control. She would keep control. She would...

She had to clench her fists tighter, until her long nails started to pierce the skin of her palms, but she kept quiet. And eventually the impulse to shout after Russ was gone. Good. As much as she wanted Russ to come back, the thought of showing him her true feelings, her weakness, was way too awful.

Belinda decided that she'd sit for at least ten minutes or so, just to make sure Russ didn't feel like he'd won when she came back through the woods to the van. But just then, she heard a sound in the cabin right behind her.

Her head twisted toward the sound. It almost sounded as if a coin had dropped onto the cabin floor. She heard that rattling sound that a coin made when it spun to a stop.

"Who's there?" she asked. "Slick? Dave?"

Probably both of them, trying to play a trick on her and scare her.

Well, she wasn't going to let them win *that* game, that was for sure.

She stood. She was facing the large, black rectangle of a doorway. The open space looked like the lid of a coffin. Everything in her body cried: Run! Run, Belinda!

But she couldn't give in to her baser instincts like that. She had to show her body who was boss. She took a cautious step inside the cabin.

It was hard to see. And before her eyes could adjust to the deeper darkness of the cabin, she heard another sound. A clink. Like another coin had been dropped on the left side of the cabin.

She peered into the corner, but there was nothing there, just some more of those ugly metal bunk beds. Which meant...

She spun to her right, her heart suddenly pounding.

She was sure that Slick or Dave had thrown the coin over to the left side of the cabin. That was an old trick. They threw something to get you to turn your head, then they came up behind you.

But there was no one lurking in the shadows on the right side of the cabin. No Slick, no Dave, no—what was the name of that guy that Slick had told them about?—Jonesy Vorhouse?

She walked farther into the dark recesses of the cabin. She wanted to prove two things. One, that she was really alone, and two, that she could conquer her fears. She did one entire lap of the cabin's pitch-dark walls. You see, she told herself. You're letting your mind play tricks on you. There were no coins.

Then she returned to the center of the cabin floor. Okay, she was thinking, you did it, Belinda. Now get out, girl! Because coins or no coins, there was still something awfully eerie about this cabin—evil, even—and enough was enough.

Which is exactly why Belinda forced herself to keep standing right where she was, right smack in the center of the cabin. She told herself she would stand there until all fear had left her. However long it took.

As she stood, she found herself staring down.

There was something shiny at her feet.

A penny.

It was the coin she had heard dropping a few seconds before, making the sound that had brought her into the cabin in the first place.

And then, all at once, an awful thought rushed through her brain. She had checked the *left* side of the cabin. She had checked the *right* side. But she hadn't checked...

Overhead, something stirred.

Belinda looked up just in time to see the man swing down to meet her.

The face was hidden behind a white hockey mask. The masked head smacked right into hers, bumping her hard, dazing her.

She staggered, barely able to take in what she was seeing.

There was someone hanging upside down like a bat from the rafters. And this masked figure was holding something, something iron.

And then the man in the mask swung the iron thing, aiming right at the base of her skull—

You Gotta See This

"Cool!" Slick exclaimed.

Summer must have taken the wrong trail back from the lake, because they didn't find the horseshoe of old cabins. Instead, they came out in front of a large, run-down building with a carved wooden sign that said LODGE. Slick had climbed up onto the porch. The windows were all boarded-up with unpainted plywood. Slick had pried one of the slats back with his hands and was peering inside. "You gotta see this," he called.

Summer stood at the base of the path, her hands in her pockets. "Slick," she called. "They're probably going crazy looking for us."

A dark, jagged shape wheeled jerkily through the darkness over her head. It went by so fast that Summer couldn't be sure what she'd seen. Was that a bat?

"Slick, come on," she said, with a new urgency. She'd never been afraid of animals, but bats and rats were two exceptions. One summer back in Carville, a bat had gotten into their attic and had wriggled under her bedroom door at night, and when she sat up shouting and turned on the light she came face to face with that tiny, crumpled, dark face with its beady, unseeing eyes. The bat had swooped in crazy circles around her small room. That night, it had taken three of her brothers, all armed with tennis rackets, to subdue the tiny creature. They had also managed to subdue her lamp and two paintings, and everyone had ended up laughing about the incident. But for months afterward she'd had this recurring nightmare in which she was kissing Slick passionately and then opened her eyes and found she was making out with a bat.

"Slick!" she called. "Please!"

But he was trying the door now. It was latched. Thank goodness, thought Summer. But Slick wasn't giving up, and with a few hard yanks he managed to pull the rusted hasp loose from the rotted wood in the door frame. He stared into the darkness beyond the door. "Summer, you've gotta see this. I've never seen so many spiderwebs in my life. It's like a ghost town in here."

"Slick, I said I want to get back."

"And there's an old piano, and—oh, too cool. Summer, I think there are still some camp pictures on the walls. You gotta check this out."

"No, Slick. I don't."

He turned back and gave her his most seductive and devilish grin. "There's a sofa," he said. Then he stepped backward into the darkness, vanishing like a magician in a stage show.

"*Slick!*"

He didn't answer her. She knew why. He was waiting. Probably waiting on the sofa, too. She tried to shake that image from her mind, but once she had thought of it, it kept a tenacious grip on her, as if the image had talons that were sinking into the soft tissue of her brain.

She could picture just how it would go if she went inside that lodge. That was one of the things that had helped Slick seduce her all these times. When he got that certain look in his eye, she could picture just what he had in mind. He would be lying there, one leg dangling off the edge of the sofa. Maybe he would have even taken off his T-shirt. He'd be smiling.

She took a step out of the woods toward the lodge. She yelled at herself not to go any farther.

But now she was picturing the time—that magic time—the very first time he had taken her up to his attic. He had gone up the stairs ahead of her. When she came up into the attic, it was dark.

"Slick?" she had whispered.

He had sprung at her from behind, spinning her around, pushing her up against the attic's slanting wall, pressing himself against her....

She shouldn't be thinking about that first kiss now. She'd be a goner if she thought about stuff like that. As if clinging to her last hope, Summer reached behind her to hold onto the tree she had just passed.

Instead her hands touched a human face.

Wrestling

Summer screamed as two hands closed around her waist, pulling her roughly into the darkness. She kept screaming, but the hands closed around her mouth.

"Stop it!" Dave whispered, laughing. "Quiet! I want to scare Slick. Where is he?"

Now that Dave had taken his hands off her mouth, Summer covered her mouth with her own hands. She felt like otherwise her heart would leap right out her throat, she was so scared.

Dave chuckled. "I really got you, huh?"

"You're the world's biggest fungus brain," Summer told him. "I'm serious. How do you remember all those plays in football when you have nothing inside that head of yours?"

But he just kept laughing. There was no point trying to insult him, he was feeling so proud of his little stunt that he was immune to insult.

"Slick's in the lodge," she said. "Go scare the crap out of him, would ya?"

Dave grinned. "You bet."

But before he could take three steps toward the lodge, Slick sprang out from inside the lodge, shouting so loudly that Summer almost fainted. At least this time Dave got scared too. He fell to the wet grass and started laughing. "Oh, man, you got me," he said. "You got me. How did you know I was coming?"

"You wusses," Slick said, shaking his head. "How stupid do you think I am? You don't think I heard Summer screaming? Anyway, voices carry really well in this country air."

"Dave, you gotta see this place," he added, heading back inside the lodge. "It's so creepy."

Dave picked up a rock and winged it at the building. It bounced off one of the boarded-up windows with a hollow thud. "I gotta go find Missy," he said. "And then we all better head back. You guys seen Russ and Belinda?"

Summer said she hadn't.

Dave rolled his eyes. "She's probably giving him the business somewhere."

"And not the good kind of business," Slick said from inside the lodge. He was right, voices did carry.

Dave disappeared back into the woods. Summer glanced toward the lodge, the dark open doorway. Beyond that door lay Slick—and danger. She looked back into the dark woods.

"Dave?" she called.

There was no answer.

"We'll meet you back at the van," she called.

Then she turned and walked up the grassy slope toward the lodge.

***

Dave followed the winding trail, letting it lead him through the woods. He yelled for Missy, Russ, Belinda—anybody.

The trail brought him to a small, square building. Through the screen door Dave could just make out the glint of porcelain—a row of sinks. Outhouse. The sight reminded him instantly of how long it had been since he'd been to the bathroom. He climbed the two cinder-block steps and went in, letting the door clang shut behind him.

Inside, the bathroom smelled putrid and there was no light. Groping with his hands, he found a wall switch, which of course didn't work. Great. More groping as he worked his way like a blind man over to the stalls.

Maybe he should go back outside and go to the bathroom in the woods where at least there was some moonlight trickling down through the leaves. No, he decided. The dark bathroom was safer. Out there, he might wipe himself with poison ivy... or run into a bear.

Look at the way he was talking. Like that pansy, Buzzy Bateman! Well, it wasn't his fault, a night spent roaming around in the dark woods was bound to shake up anybody.

He opened the first stall door. Started inside. Then he froze. As dark as it was in the stall he could still see that there was someone sitting on the toilet.

"This stall's occupied," said a deep voice.

"Russ!" Dave said, and cackled. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Close the door, would you?"

Dave laughed harder. Opening stall doors on guys who were going to the toilet was pretty standard fare in the locker room after football practice. Their favorite target was Buzzy, of course. But in this place... "What's the difference?" Dave asked. "It's so dark in here I can't see my own body."

"Just close it."

Dave obliged. He groped his way to the next stall, unbuckled his pants, and sat down on the toilet, breathing a sigh of relief. He could feel every single tackle he'd received in this afternoon's game. He needed to get in a whirlpool. "Is there any toilet paper in this hellhole?" he asked Russ through the stall wall.

"No," Russ said glumly. "And the water's not running either."

"Excellent."

"I know."

"That Teddy," grumbled Dave. "He messes up everything he touches.

Figures he would get us lost."

Russ didn't answer. The way he protected Buzzy, it was like the guy was in love with him or something.

"You find Belinda?" Dave asked.

"Yeah."

"And?"

"And what?"

"You guys make up?"

Russ didn't answer right away. "No," he said finally.

Dave whistled. "I don't know why you take it from her, I really don't. I mean, you're bigger than her, Russ, you know?"

Dave heard Russ moving around in the next stall, heard the clomp of Russ's work boots on the floor. Then he heard him zipping his pants. "I'm going out to look for some wet leaves," Russ told him.

"Gross!"

"You better do the same, man," Russ said. "Otherwise I'm not riding back in the van with you."

Dave chortled. Russ was all right. For a black guy.

The latrine's screen door swung open, then clanged shut once more. Dave relaxed.

Then the screen door opened again.

"Russ?"

No response.

Footsteps.

The door to his stall flew open.

For an instant, Dave figured it was Russ, and that Russ was just getting him back for opening the door on him. Then Dave managed to see the outlines of the person who stood in front of his stall—and see the white mask on the guy's face—and his stomach heaved. It was good he was sitting on a toilet, because otherwise he would have gone to the bathroom in his pants.

A hand suddenly shot out of nowhere and punched Dave in the throat. The hand didn't let go, either. It pinned his head back against the flimsy plywood wall of the bathroom, choking him.

Dave's two hands came up to pull the attacker's single hand off his neck. Dave was a strong guy. He did the Nautilus circuit at the school gym three times a week. But he couldn't budge that hand.

He also couldn't breathe. Which meant he was getting weaker. He began to black out when the hand suddenly let go. Dave gasped and choked, falling forward. Then he felt the hand close its iron grip on his red wavy hair. The guy in the mask yanked.

Dave was pulled forward; he fell off the toilet, landing at his attacker's feet—and he saw a very strange thing. Keds purple hightops. The big, goofy kind Buzzy always wore, the kind that made Buzzy look

even more like a bozo.

But this couldn't be Buzzy, because there was no way Buzzy would be strong enough to pull him right up off the floor and bash Dave's head first against one side of the metal stall, and then back against the other. And then the guy stepped into the stall with him. The man in the mask grabbed Dave with both hands, lifted him, and turned him and—

All at once Dave knew what the guy was trying to do. And even though he hadn't fully recovered from the choking yet—or from getting his head bashed—he began to buck with all his might.

Because there was no way this guy was going to get his head into that filthy old toilet.

But the man in the mask was so strong! Dave's head was going down. The smell came up to meet him. It had a more powerful effect on him than smelling salts. He kicked backward like a goat and managed to catch the guy hard in the groin. He heard a low groan. Dave didn't waste a second. He struggled to his feet, turning and punching at the same time. He hit the guy in the face with all his might.

And nearly broke his hand on the mask.

But he didn't stop for a second, he just flailed away with his good hand, the unhurt left, pummeling the man in the mask in the throat, in the stomach, landing two more low blows just for good measure.

The masked figure backed out of the stall into the washroom. Dave followed, karate kicking with all his might. His boot caught the masked man just under the chin, a blow that should have killed him.

The guy went flying back into the row of sinks, cracking his head against the long row of mirrors that Dave hadn't even known was there. The glass shattered. But instead of dying, the attacker pushed off the sinks and charged, lowering his masked head.

Maybe it was Buzzy after all, because who else but a dork would be so dumb as to come in so low like that? With the same ease with which he had avoided Thompson's blitz this afternoon, Dave easily sidestepped the onrushing attacker. And as the figure went by, he chopped down on the back of the guy's neck.

He heard the satisfying crash as the man in the mask banged headfirst into a closed stall door. The door opened inward; the man flew into the stall and fell on the floor.

"Had enough?" Dave asked. Because he never liked to leave a fight until his opponent had not only lost but had also begged for mercy. Besides, he was still worrying about those purple hightops. This *might* be Teddy, the geek of all geeks. And if it was Teddy, Dave had already lost this fight, just by letting a wuss surprise him the way Teddy had. If this was Teddy, Dave would pretty much have to kill him, just to save face.

"I said, had enough, sissy?"

Whoever it was, he didn't answer. The stall door slowly swung back out. Dave strained his eyes to see the kid in the mask as he sauntered back out. Unbelievable, the guy appeared to be unscathed.

Right then, Dave felt relief. Because at least he knew he was up against a tough opponent. So Buzzy hadn't surprised him, after all.

Then the guy charged. He hit Dave high, his arms wrapping around Dave's body like hoops of steel. They both went down.

Hitting the floor knocked the wind out of Dave. Which was one of the worst feelings in the world, as far as Dave was concerned. It was like getting punched in the lungs. He couldn't move or breathe. And all the time, he was looking straight up into the hate-filled eyes of the man in the mask.

And realizing that it was Buzzy after all.

***

Teddy had seen enough wrestling matches to know what he was supposed to do next. He moved to the side, setting his body perpendicular to Dave's. He pressed Dave's back hard against the floor, making sure there was no air space in between.

He held him there, waiting for an imaginary ref to slap the floor to indicate a successful pin, waiting for the crowd to roar. During wrestling season, Teddy, who never went out for any team sports, assisted the coach and cut up orange sections for the wrestlers to eat right after their matches. Every time the crowd roared, it burned in his ears. They never roared for him.

They didn't roar now.

And Dave wasn't moving. He was just making these tiny gasping sounds. That wasn't right. The victim was supposed to be struggling helplessly.

Another wave of fury swept through Teddy's powerful body.

Crooking fingers into claws, he ended his little wrestling session with a maneuver never seen on the rubber mats of Carville.

He ripped out Dave's throat.

K-I-S-S-I-N-G

Summer paused in the doorway. "Slick?"

Slick was right; there were cobwebs everywhere. The white strands gave the old lodge a fuzzy look, like a movie that was out of focus. Summer panned big, dark room and saw the stone fireplace, the old sagging piano, the ratty vinyl sofa with the stuffing spilling out of it... but no Slick.

"Slick?"

She heard a sound in the far recesses of the room and for the first time saw the stone archway. It led to another room. She didn't particularly want to go back there. It was dark enough in the front of the lodge.

On the other hand, she couldn't help getting excited. Where was Slick hiding? With Slick, fear was just part of the game.

She stepped into the room. Faded rectangular patches dotted the walls, spots where pictures had once hung. One or two pictures still remained, but she didn't step close enough to take a look; she certainly didn't get close enough to see that in place of each young camper's face was the grim, silently staring face of the young boy who had drowned, Jason Voorhees.

More noise from beyond the stone arch. Papers rustling... or was it just the breeze wafting through the slats in the boarded-up windows?

The floorboards were loose and creaked at every step. Summer was breathing heavily. This was too scary, she decided. It was no longer sexy. It was more like it was going to give her a stroke.

"Slick?"

A sudden loud fluttering over her head made her gasp, but when she tilted her head to look at the high arched wooden ceiling she didn't see a thing, just those endless cobwebs waving slowly like underwater plants.

She passed the sofa and then the piano, a rotted baby grand. The piano's black top was up, blocking her view of the bench and the keys. The darkness had deepened, so that now she had to keep her hands in front of her. Cobwebs kept attaching themselves to her face. She spat.

She had been sort of planning, when she first came in, to do something outrageous and shocking, something that would surprise even Slick. Like take her shirt off. But now the only thing on her mind was getting out of the lodge. She paused, one foot in the air. Then she turned. Though she couldn't have said why, she was about to bolt.

Then someone started plinking out a dinky tune on the piano with one finger. Every note sounded wooden and horribly off-key, but she

could still make out the tune.

"Slick," she said, turning back to the piano, "it's nice of you to remember my birthday, but you're a month late. My birthday was in August. And you didn't call, I might add."

"Who are you talking to?" said a voice behind her.

She spun back—right into Slick's arms. And before she could react, he was kissing her.

One of the bad things about Slick Chambers was that there were so many girls around Carville who could vouch for the fact that he was an excellent kisser. The guy sure got around. On the other hand, one of the good things about Slick was that it was all true. He was an excellent kisser. Summer worked her fingers into his hair as she kissed him back. He lifted her off the ground and spun her around. "Hey," he said.

"Hey yourself."

He had taken her so off guard that it was only then that she remembered. She turned her head, trying to look back through the darkness at the piano. The playing had stopped. "Who was...?" she began.

Slick didn't answer. Instead he bent down and scooped her up into his arms. "I've prepared deluxe accommodations," he told her.

"You shouldn't have," she said.

Whoever it was who was sitting at the piano—Russ? Belinda? Missy? —Summer decided they could play the piano to their heart's content. If they didn't mind intruding on her and Slick, she didn't mind either. Nothing mattered to her anymore. She thought idly about how she had been resisting this moment all day long, and how, now that it had come, it seemed foolish to have fought it at all. It was inevitable. Summer and Slick, Slick and Summer—they went together, like burgers and shakes. Or something. She laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing."

"That *is* funny," he said.

He was carrying her through the stone archway into what turned out to be an old abandoned office. There was a filing cabinet, its metal drawers open and empty. There was an old wooden desk set at an odd angle in the middle of the floor, its drawers removed. Part of the desktop had broken off, leaving a jagged, menacing edge. There were papers all over the floor in a circle around the desk.

"I cleared a little desk space for us," Slick explained, lowering her onto the desktop.

"How romantic," Summer said. "You make me feel like a homework assignment."

"I'm going to get an A," Slick said.

"*I'll* do the grading if you don't mind."

"Okay," Slick agreed. He was leaning over her, like a doctor over his patient; now he swooped down for a fast kiss. Too fast as far as Summer was concerned. He pulled his head back, looking at her, waiting.

"B-plus," she said.

Slick smiled briefly, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Okay," he said again. "Here comes an A." He started walking his fingers across the desk like a spider. His fingers moved across her stomach. They started walking up. She caught his hand. But now he swooped down for another kiss, pinning her body against the desk with his own. He held her hands over her head, kissed her endlessly until she finally had to turn her head away to catch a breath. But now he was kissing her neck and she let out a moan, which she wished right away she hadn't done. Now it sure didn't matter what grade she gave him; he knew he had just aced the finals.

He raised himself above her, supporting himself by the edges of the desk, when another piece of the desktop cracked off in his hand. Slick swore, put his hand to his mouth.

"You okay?"

He kept his hand in his mouth, then took it out and peered at in the darkness. "Sure, what's a little blood?"

"You're bleeding?!"

The thought of Slick getting so much as a hangnail suddenly seemed like the absolute worst thing in the world to her. Slick had won her totally, heart and soul, Summer realized. She could never fight it again. "You're going to have to get a tetanus shot," she told him.

"Nah." He ran a finger carefully along the jagged edge of the wood. "It's just wood, no nails."

"So?"

"So forget about it," he told her.

And she did. For the next ten minutes, she forgot about everything. Forgot about his cut, forgot all her troubles and pains, forgot about the person who had been playing piano in the darkness, forgot all the reasons why she had told herself she would never get back together with Slick. She also forgot the fluttering sounds she kept hearing overhead. Forgot, forgot...

For her and Slick it had been like this since kiss one.

When they touched, sparks flew. It was as if their bodies might spontaneously burst into flames.

Nothing could have pulled them apart, not now.

Nothing.

Except Russ Johnson screaming at the top of his lungs.

Shock

"HELP! GOD! SHE'S—OH GOD! SHE'S...!!"

Russ was bellowing so loudly it was hard to make out the words, but it was impossible to miss the terror in his voice. He screamed again, then a third time, the sound coming in short, horrified blasts. Then there was silence. Slick had climbed off Summer, who sat up, fussing stupidly with her clothes, as if that mattered, as if anything—

"C'mon," Slick said, grabbing her hand.

She started to hop off the desk.

"Careful!" Slick cried. He helped her up and over the razor's edge of broken wood. The hand she was holding was wet. Slick silently switched her hand to his other hand, and she realized what that wetness was.

"You're bleeding," she said.

He didn't answer her. Because, in the distance, they heard Russ screaming again. It was a horrible sound, like a stuck pig. "Oh, wow," Slick mumbled.

He pulled her harder. They rushed out through the dark lodge. They were out the door, down the rickety steps, down the trail, and into the woods, so they didn't hear the music.

The ghost of Jason Voorhees went back to playing the lodge's rotted old piano.

***

Russ was easy to find. Slick and Summer just followed his screams. They found him crashing through the woods about a hundred yards from the lodge. He was crying. His gray Carville sweatshirt was stained with large splotches of blood.

Summer and Slick both stopped short when they saw him.

"Belinda," he said. The word came out garbled, he was crying so hard. He covered his face in his hands, tilting his head back as he sobbed. Summer stared at him. Her first thought was that he and Belinda had broken up and Russ was taking it awfully hard. But that didn't fit with the screaming and blood and—

"Someone killed Belinda!" Russ roared.

Summer and Slick just stared at him. It was impossible to take it in. Summer felt dumb with shock. She just gaped at him, open-mouthed. She couldn't put it all together. What had happened? Belinda... dead? That was like a bad joke. And despite what Russ had said, she didn't believe it, not for an instant.

Slick was shouting at Russ now, getting right in his face as he tried to yell some sense into him. "Stop it!" Slick roared. "Get a grip!"

"SHE'S DEAD!" Russ screamed back. "HER BRAINS ARE ALL OVER THE CABIN FLOOR! OKAY?!"

Summer felt her knees buckle, as if they were suddenly as thin and wavy as those cobwebs back in the lodge. Then her stomach heaved and she bent over and started vomiting. When she finally stopped throwing up, and staggered back to her feet, it was like nothing had changed. Russ was still sobbing, and Slick was still staring at him, looking almost angry. It was like a freeze frame at the end of a movie, right before the credits rolled.

Slick shook Russ's shoulders. "You crazy bastard!" he shouted. "You killed her! Didn't you?! Didn't you?!!"

Russ grabbed Slick and shoved him up against the trunk of a tree, but the spasm of anger passed as quickly as it came. Russ let Slick go. Russ was crying again. "Someone knocked out her brains," he moaned. "Who would do that... who would do a thing like that to her?"

Summer bent over sharply, as if she were doing a frantic bow, and threw up a second time. Then she lifted her shirt and wiped her mouth and face with it. There was no thought about Russ or Slick seeing her body. It was like they weren't there.

"We've got to get back to the van and get out of here," Russ said.

"What about the others?" Slick asked.

"I don't know," Russ said. "But I'm not sticking around here looking for them. We've got to go!"

Slick cupped his hands to his mouth. There was enough moonlight for Summer to see the nasty gash in the meat of his right palm; the blood was oozing. "DAVE!" he yelled. "MISSY!"

"Don't do that," Russ said numbly. "You're just telling the killer where we are."

Slick had always been cool, but now that they were faced with a horrible crisis, he had become too cool—almost a zombie. There was no expression in his voice. "All right," he said. "Let's go to the van."

"MISSY!" Summer suddenly screamed. She barely managed to stop herself from screaming for Belinda as well.

When she stopped screaming, the only sounds she heard were the rustle of leaves in the breeze.

"We've got to go!" Russ pleaded, but he made no effort to leave. It was like they had all lost their willpower. They just stood there, frozen with shock.

Until they heard the loud footsteps, that is. Someone was coming through the woods, hurrying toward them.

That was all they needed.

They began to run.

Slick Goes Bats

Slick was moving with that slim-hipped grace that had carried him around so many would-be tacklers. In this case the tacklers were trees. The only thing slowing him down was Summer and Russ. He kept turning and jogging in place, letting them catch up.

Summer was running as fast as she could. She was so frightened it was as if even her brain were trembling. The only comforting fact she could cling to was that Slick was there, and Russ was right behind her, lumbering along big as a bear. Hard to believe that anything could happen to her with bodyguards like these two, and yet...

What was that fluttering? As she ran, Summer slowly became aware of the flapping sounds, the dark shapes circling right over—

She stopped short, so short that Russ bumped into her and down she went. He helped her up. Up ahead, Slick had stopped again and turned, looking back at them.

"SLICK!" Summer screamed.

The first bat landed right on the oozing bloody gash in his palm. He slapped his hand against his leg.

"BEHIND YOU!" Summer shrieked.

Slick spun fast, which meant that the bat swooping down behind him crashed into his face. Slick's hands flew up, slapping the bat away. But now another bat landed on the back of his neck. He spun back the other way, slapping at it, but it clung to him, a small black ball of fur that stuck to his skin like a living boil.

Summer's legs were wobblier than ever, but she managed to move herself forward. Still screaming, she ran to Slick. He was turning in circles, flailing his arms, slapping at the bats which landed in twos and threes and fours.

Shouting, crying, Summer tried to pry the bats off Slick's body. The feel of the warm fur—the beating hearts—sickened her horribly. But she kept swatting and slapping at them.

Meanwhile, Russ had picked up a big stick and was swinging it like a baseball bat, bashing bats out of the air as they clustered around Slick. Whenever he connected with one of the bats, there was a strange metal clink, as if these weren't real bats at all, but only metal models.

Slick toppled backward into a tree. The tree held him up as another bat dive-bombed down into his face and stayed there, its thin wings covering the whole left side of his head. And now Summer waded forward through the dark cloud, punching out at the bats with her bare fists, ripping, clawing—

She felt something sharp sink into her hand. It was like getting a

shot. She felt the first stab of pain at the puncture wound, then only a dull ache. But when she looked down, one of the small, furry creatures was attached to her hand. She smacked her hand hard against a tree, so hard she was sure she had broken bones, but at least she got rid of the bat. But now another one landed on her back, and another on her chest, and another. She felt the pulsing, furry bodies nestling against her neck. Felt the little heads of the awful creatures pushing through the gaps in her clothes, pushing with a terrible urgency until they reached bare skin. The fangs bit into her flesh. But still she tried to get the bats off Slick. He was screaming.

And then Russ grabbed her and was pulling her away.

"NOOOOO!!" she screamed.

But Russ didn't listen, pulling her harder, yanking, shoving, so that she tripped backward over a rock. But Russ held her up, dragging her. He had the stick in one hand, and he used it to clobber the bats that clung to her. It meant he hit her too, and she went down from the force of the blows. She heard that same strange metallic crunch as he struck each bat. Then he picked her up in his arms and for the second time she was being carried, like a bride over the threshold, as Russ ran through the forest.

She turned her head, still screaming. Looking back over Russ's shoulder, she saw Slick sinking slowly to his knees. His body was covered with bats. It was as if he were on fire, but instead of being engulfed with flames he was being consumed by a black cloud.

And more bats were landing every second.

Summer kept shouting, kept clawing at Russ's arms, but it was as if his skin were made of steel. He kept running.

Slick quickly receded, disappearing into darkness.

The Van

Russ ran back along the trail and out to the muddy road. Still carrying Summer, he thundered back toward the van.

Summer screamed for him to put her down, but he didn't listen until she started to sink her nails into his neck.

He jogged to a halt. But as soon as he put her down, she started to run back to Slick.

Russ grabbed her. She flailed away at his chest, pummeling him, trying to push him away, but he held her easily. Pushing against his arms was like trying to lift a piano.

"YOU CAN'T HELP HIM!" Russ shouted at her, even though their faces were only inches apart. "WE'VE GOT TO SAVE OURSELVES!"

Only part of Russ's message got through to her. There was no help for Slick. That she got. And it was as if part of her own body was dying back there in the woods. She had given in to Slick fully, she had given him her heart. And now her heart was dying. She felt her knees buckle. She went down.

The next thing she knew, Russ had picked her up again. He was carrying her. She felt her body shaking up and down with each jolt as his feet pounded the dirt road.

He didn't put her down again until they reached the spot where the van had left the road. Holding her hand, he guided her down over the edge of the sandy shoulder and down the wet, grassy culvert to the spot where they had left the van.

The woods were dappled silver with moonlight. Summer could see the van's tire tracks. She could see the battered tree the van had crashed into. But the van...

The van was gone.

"They left us!" Russ cried. He turned around fast, as if they might still be able to catch up to the van if they hurried. "They left us!" he yelled again, louder this time. "I can't believe it!"

Summer just kept staring at the tree, staring at the spot where the van had been. The idea that Coach could have driven off and left them behind was, at that moment, so incomprehensible to her that it seemed more plausible that the van had somehow vanished into thin air. She looked at Russ. They were really doomed now. They would die for sure.

Just then she heard an engine rev to life.

It was a welcome sound.

She turned, searching for the source of the sound, but she didn't spot the van until its headlights flicked on. Two bright, white beams lit up all the plants and trees in their path and shone right into Summer's

eyes. She could barely see anything as the van roared out from behind the brush.

She could tell, however, that there was no one behind the wheel of the large white car, which was speeding straight at them.

The Sacrifice

Summer tried to dive out of the way, but Russ was in her way, standing rooted as a tree. A tree that was about to get mowed down by —

Shrieking, Summer shoved Russ with all her might. Russ, losing his balance, took one step to the side, taking her along with him.

The van came so close to hitting her that she felt the metal flick the back of her shirt before she and Russ went down.

The van rushed on, hitting first one tree, then the next. Then the driverless car stalled. The ignition turned—once, twice, three times before the engine caught. The headlights came back on. The van started to maneuver through a U-turn. Summer didn't need to see anymore. She knew the van was coming for them again.

She was pulling on Russ now, shouting, trying to get him back to his feet. Together, they both started to run into the thickest part of the surrounding forest, putting as many trees as they could between them and the van.

They went about a hundred yards before they heard the crash. They stopped, turned. The van was coming after them!

Smashing into trees right and left, the battered car kept backing up and, like a battering ram, cleared its own path through the woods until ...

KABOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMM!!!!!

The engine of the van exploded in a giant fireball that turned the black forest into a blaze of light. A wave of heat surged outward from the blast, knocking Summer and Russ to the ground. She could actually hear the tips of her bangs singeing. She could feel the smoke and grime burn into her skin.

But at least the van was dead. Russ moved close to her, putting a protective arm around her shoulders, holding her, squeezing her tightly as they watched the van burn.

As they lay on the ground, their heads were close together.

Which made it easy for Teddy to smack them both in the skull with one clean blow.

***

Teddy didn't know it, but it was the third time that night that Summer had been carried in a boy's arms.

Before tonight, Teddy had barely been able to lug the equipment bag out to the field for football practice. The team would always jog past

him as he struggled and sweated. "BUZZ-EE, BUZZ-EE!" they would chant.

Now that he had put on the mask, Teddy was carrying Summer effortlessly. If only the team could see him now.

Well, maybe they'd get that chance, he thought happily. Killing Missy and Belinda and Dave had been a real thrill, but it hadn't satisfied him. Besides, the bats had gypped him out of one of his dearest prizes. They had sucked all the blood out of Slick before he got there. When he hacked at Slick with his tire iron, there was nothing left of him, just a bunch of guts. He had kicked him in the face a few times, but he couldn't get too excited about it, knowing that Slick couldn't feel a thing.

Killing three teenagers—it didn't seem like enough of a payback for sixteen straight years of humiliation. Maybe if Teddy drove the van back to Carville and ripped out the guts of every single player on the team, maybe that would start to calm him down.

But first...

He looked down through his mask at the beautiful, unconscious girl in his arms.

First he would kill Summer and Russ.

They were just about the only kids at Carville High who had ever been nice to him. They had treated him special, and he would return the favor.

He would sacrifice them on Jason's altar.

The bats wheeling in crazy circles over Teddy's head helped lead the way up Crystal Hill.

It was so dark out, Teddy could barely see the hole in the rock wall that marked the entrance to the cave. But up ahead, the bats were disappearing in droves, and as he came closer he saw the jagged gap in the rock.

The cave felt strangely familiar to him, as if in a dream. He ducked his head as he entered. That was a strange experience in itself. Before tonight he'd been a shrimp; he'd never had to duck his head to get in anywhere.

He stepped over loose rock as he entered the cool, dripping grotto. Summer's head lolled lifelessly over his arm, her short, dark hair hanging straight down and bouncing. Such a beauty. With such sharp features—thin lips and thin nose, as if someone had drawn them on Summer's face in clean lines.

Summer was a wisecracker, but Teddy had always known the truth about her. She had a heart of gold. And now that heart would be his.

Literally.

***

Her head was bouncing. And with each bounce, Summer felt the pain at the base of her skull. It was as if she were being hit there again and again and—

She briefly opened her eyes.

Stalactites.

The word, which she had once had to memorize for some science class, now floated up into her brain. She closed her eyes again. Stalactites, those were things that formed on the upper walls of caves as the...

She lost consciousness again, but the pain kept bringing her back awake. Then came a jolt of fear as she remembered where she was and —

This time when she opened her eyes she kept them open and saw the white hockey mask on the man's face.

Just like Slick had said!

She began to squirm and wriggle as best she could, but whoever was behind that mask was very strong. He looked down at her, surprised to see she was awake. He tightened his grip.

Not only did she stop squirming, she now found it hard to breathe as well.

Those eyes staring down at her through the dark eyeholes of the mask—there was something familiar about them. But her head was bouncing too hard and she couldn't get a clear look and now—

He was carrying her into a smaller grotto. The air was getting colder and colder the farther back they went. They came to a small, jagged hole in the rock face. The man in the mask set her down on the rock floor. She was about to try to get to her feet and run when he grabbed a handful of her hair, just for safekeeping. She watched him as he began to step through the hole. She only watched for a second, because as he stepped into the hole, he pulled her head hard, and her whole body was dragged across the rocks and up against the base of the wall.

He disappeared through the hole. Then two hands reached back for her, two hands that gripped like iron. The hands found her hands and dragged her roughly up the wall and through the hole after him. She went through the hole facefirst, scraping along the rocks as if she were a vegetable going through a giant scraper.

They were in the last room of the cave. There was a dim light spilling from a metal flashlight that lay on the cave floor. Strewn near the flashlight were the chewed-up remains of a middle-aged man in a tattered, blue-plaid hunter's vest.

Some of the light from the flashlight spilled onto the cave walls. Something had been scratched all over the walls, like a decoration in wavy lines.

Summer struggled to her knees. But the masked man picked her up.

He carried her, kicking, to a large, smooth rock like an altar. He put her down on her back across the rock, so that her head hung back off one end, her legs off the other. With her head at this angle, she could read the markings scrawled so furiously all over the walls. It was the word Jason, scratched into the wall upside down as with tiny claws, over and over and over.

That wasn't all she could see. Way up high, the entire ceiling of the cave was wriggling with furry little bats.

The sight of the bats gave her another jolt of energy and she struggled desperately to her feet. The man in the mask towered over her. He pushed her back onto the rock with a shove of his big hand. She went down hard, so that the bone at the base of her spine thumped the rock, sending a shock wave of pain back up her nervous system.

The man in the mask reached in the pocket of his pants and pulled out something short and gray. Summer's dazed brain made a strange guess—a glasses case. But then the man pushed a little button on the gray case and a triangle of metal pushed out the tip.

An X-acto knife. The kind her brother Harry used as an eight-year-old, when he had cut out those cardboard pieces to make his own model airplanes.

The man's strong, hairy hand punched her hard in the jaw, so that she sprawled backward, hitting her head against the rock wall of the cave.

She felt like she had blacked out, but she couldn't even tell anymore—it was all she could do to lift her head, flailing an arm to push off against the rock. She got her head up high enough to see the man slit her cotton cheerleading shirt right down the middle, as if he were about to perform surgery. She felt a sting. He had drawn blood.

Over her head, the bats stirred restlessly.

And then Summer smelled the faint smell of smoke. The man in the mask must have smelled it too. Because his head turned toward the small hole that led out of the cavern.

Summer took the opportunity to grab the hand that held the X-acto blade. She pushed the hand back with all her might so that the knife sliced cleanly through the fleshy middle of the man's other arm.

The man turned his masked head back to look at what she'd done. He stared down at his arm as if puzzled.

Still holding his hand and the knife, Summer slashed upward, stabbing under the man's mask, piercing his Adam's apple. His blood was spurting freely now. The bats were circling wildly, cheeping in high-pitched little screeches. And now the masked man viciously swung his arm—the arm that held the knife—at Summer. It was the back of his fist that did the damage. He caught Summer on the chin and sent her sprawling backward yet again. She was bleeding from her

mouth now, and her stomach, and the back of her head. She felt as wet and runny with blood as the slimy cave was wet with trickling water. The screeching of the bats grew louder.

The man stepped forward. His blood dripped down onto her face as he glared down at her. He knelt. He groped for the slit in Summer's shirt while his other hand raised the knife. She tried to protect herself, scrunching into a ball, both arms closing around her stomach, but he flicked her arms away with his hand...

And then the X-acto knife came down and with an architect's precision, he cut out her heart. He pulled the organ out from her chest cavity with a loud *plop!* and held it up for her to see. It was still beating, beating, like a big red fist, clenching and unclenching.

But her fantasies had gotten the best of her again. Because the man in the mask was still studying her as if with lust and love, still holding the knife raised high over her head.

And only now did he bring down the blade.

For once, though, her fantasies weren't so far off the mark, because—sure enough—the man in the mask pushed her shirt aside and started feeling for her heart with his hand.

It wasn't a hard organ for him to locate, because Summer's heart was pounding like crazy, beating so hard it was as if it were trying to get out of her body to meet him. Her breath came in huge painful gulps. There was smoke in the cave now, and she was choking on it as the man traced the lines he would cut, scratching an actual line in her skin with his sharp nails. Then the man in the mask placed the knife against her flesh.

Summer screamed.

It. Not It.

It was as if there were suddenly more light in the cave, as if Summer's terror had given her supernatural powers of vision. The light gave her a clear view of the man in the mask as he started the first cut.

At the same time, the burning club landed with a thud on the side of his head.

The blow knocked him sideways. He dropped the knife.

It was Russ! He had a thick piece of wood which he had set on fire. He clubbed the man again and again, knocking him down to the rock floor. Summer found the knife. She staggered over to the fallen man. She fell to her knees. While Russ beat him, she sliced away at the fallen man's back. Then Russ pressed the burning stick against the man's orange and black sweater and navy blue pants, setting fire to his clothes.

It sounded like a hundred umbrellas were opening over their heads. Summer looked up. The fire and smoke were helping in another way as well. The fumes were flushing out the bats, sending them screeching.

The flames spread around the fallen man's tall body, outlining him in orange and red. Summer and Russ stepped back from the heat.

But as they backed away, the flaming figure slowly worked his way to his knees, and then his feet. He started toward them, a walking wall of flame. He didn't need a weapon now, because his entire body was a torch. He staggered after them, lunging for them. They tried to dodge out of his way, but the tiny grotto was cramped. It was as if they were playing some insane game of tag. It. Not it. Dead. Not dead.

Summer could hear the man's flesh crackling and sizzling, she could see him blackening and melting and dripping. She saw his bones showing through, and then she saw those bones turning black, and still he tottered after them. And through it all, the white hockey mask remained pure and uncharred and—

"The mask!" Summer screamed. For she was remembering what Slick had said. The mask possessed people.

Just then, the man lunged. Summer tried to back away from his touch, but she came up against the rock, and the burning fingers closed around her throat, searing her skin like a brand.

Just then, Russ dove onto the man's burning back, bringing him crashing up against the wall right next to Summer.

The man turned, straight-arming his flaming arm into Russ's face. He marched Russ backward, landing fiery blows to Russ's stomach one after another.

"The mask!" Summer screamed again. She jabbed the knife at the

back of the man's head where the black strap was, hoping she could cut the mask off.

The strap didn't break.

The man in the mask turned and hugged her to his burning body with both hands.

But just then, Russ closed his powerful hands around the top of the mask and pulled down with all the strength in his arms, all the strength in his fingers, all the strength he had put into those muscles in hour after hour of workouts.

There was a sudden, sickening, ripping sound as the mask—and Teddy's face—came off in his hands.

Vampire

Summer was on fire. She fell to the floor of the cave, and Russ fell on top of her, trying to smother the flames with his big body.

When he rolled off her, the flames had gone out, but she was choking horribly from the smoke.

The cave was boiling hot now. The killer's body continued to burn a few feet away. That meant there was enough light to see the huge vampire bat with the white streak on his head as he wheeled jerkily over their heads. The bat swooped down onto Summer's face.

At the same moment Summer brought her arm up with the last of her strength, plunging the X-acto knife up into the furry creature's breast.

She felt the tiny black talons scrabbling furiously against her neck and cheeks. Then a huge black wing drew across her face like a veil as the bat crawled off of her, turning in slow, wounded circles on the rock floor.

The knife was sticking out of the bat's chest. She had plunged it in past the blade so that half of the thick, gray handle was buried inside the bat.

The bat was as big as a small dog. It had an almost human face. Summer got to her feet. She was bleeding all over. She was burned. And yet she felt almost nothing.

She planted one shoe on the wriggling bat, holding it in place. She saw the tiny black talons close around her shoe's rubber sole, then she found the handle of the knife blade and pressed down hard. The screeching grew louder as she pushed the blade deeper and deeper, until her whole hand had disappeared inside the bat. She kept pushing. She brought the knife out the bat's face.

The huge bat had stopped screeching now, stopped wriggling. It was dead. Summer stared in dumb horror at the bat's exposed innards: blood and wire and gears and flesh, all intertwined. Then she dropped the knife and began to sob.

***

Russ and Summer didn't say a word to each other the entire time they were walking back down Crystal Hill. Once, Summer tripped and almost fell. Russ caught her and held her—held her for a long time.

Somehow they made it back to the cabins of the abandoned camp before they both fell to the ground. They lay in each other's arms. They slept. And the next time Summer opened her eyes, it was daylight. A

bright, sunny September morning with birds chirping.

The bright sunshine only made the horror more vivid in her mind.

She and Russ got up without a word. They were both so wounded, their clothes so burnt and tattered, that they almost didn't recognize each other. Without a word, they started their long walk out.

Behind them lay Jason's latest victims.

Behind them lay the mask, with Teddy's face attached.

The mask.

Once the police had removed the face, the mask became evidence in the new murder spree.

As such, it was duly tagged and tossed onto the pile of other odd junk sitting in the evidence room in the basement of the Crystal Lake police station.

And there the mask lay.

Waiting for its day in court.